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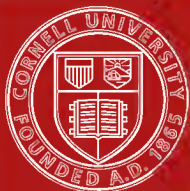
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From my youth up.



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-

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FROM MY YOUTH UP.

BY
MARION HARLAND,

AUTHOR OF

"ALONE," "HIDDEN PATH," "NEMESIS," "MOSS SIDE," "MIRIAM," "EMPTY
HEART," "HELEN GARDNER," "SUNNYBANK," "HUSBANDS AND HOMES,"
RUBY'S HUSBAND," "PHEMIE'S TEMPTATION," "AT LAST,"
"TRUE AS STEEL," "JESSAMINE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

Mary Virginia Hawes Terhune



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DEDICATION.



To

MY DAUGHTER,

THIS STORY OF EVERY-DAY LIFE AND TRIAL,

BORN OUT OF THE TRAVAIL OF A GREAT SORROW,

IS LOVINGLY AND PRAYERFULLY

DEDICATED.

Marion Harland.

I slept, and dreamed that Life was Beauty;
I woke, and found that Life was Duty.
Was, then, my dream a shadowy lie?
Toil on, faint heart, courageously.
Follow the one, and thou shalt see,
The other still will follow thee.



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FROM MY YOUTH UP.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTMAS DAY IN CHURCH.

THE MOTHER" and I were rarely seen at the same time in the square pew directly in front of the pulpit, known as the "Dominie's seat." One of us must stay at home with the baby. On the Christmas morning that begins my story, which was pronounced to be too raw and threatening for "the children" to go to church, Ronald and I were the only occupants of the chiefest and most uncomfortable seat in the Christian synagogue. The bench was high, narrow, and cushionless, and, moreover, so near the pulpit that my bonnet, an old one of the Mother's cut down and retrimmed, and coming far over my forehead, painfully circumscribed my area of vision, if I maintained an attitude at all easy and natural, to a

round space in the centre of the lower panel of the sacred desk. By inclining my head well toward my left shoulder, and sitting sidewise in my inner corner, I could just catch a glimpse of the officiating clergyman. He, being short of stature, would have been obliged to tilt head and shoulders clear over the Bible cushion if he had tried to keep his eye on that part of his flock enclosed within the walled family fold aforementioned. He was spare as well as rather short, about fifty years of age, gray-haired; and with a slight stoop in the shoulders covered by the threadbare coat. His face, being clean-shaven, was seen to be thin, angular, and sallow as parchment, but his brown eyes were bright, and his mouth sweet and sensitive. Graceful he could never have been in his youthful prime. His attitude and action in the pulpit, in later life, were awkward to grotesqueness. His elocution was simply execrable. A single specimen of his manner of reading and speaking will illustrate better than mere description, his peculiarities in this regard. The opening hymn was given somewhat after this fashion—in worse, if that could be :

“ When shep'ds watch flocks b'night,
'L seated on'e ground ;
'Ang'l of 'e Lord came down
'N glo' shone 'round.”

This without punctuation or intelligent emphasis, his voice running down like a spent humming-top at the end of each verse. From the beginning to the close of his sermon, he did not lift his eyes from the

manuscript that lay between the Bible leaves before him ; his hands were clenched hard and still upon the sides of the desk, and he read with breathless rapidity. Ultimate syllables, articles, prepositions,—occasionally a brace of words at a time,—were skipped, dropped kicked out of the way, as it were, in his headlong rush through the discourse.

I did not make these observations then. I am prepared to assert now, in the face of the fact—that, out of sixty-five people, men, women, and children, who had come to worship the Lord in his sanctuary and to keep holyday, I counted fifty-two who were asleep or nodding—that the sermon was able, original, and in style eloquent. Years afterward I found it filed away with the rest of his MSS., and recognizing text and date, read it attentively, mournfully through. The reasoning, close and logical ; the language, classic in chasteness and majesty of movement, imagination, poetry, and pathos on every page, united to make the peroration a masterpiece of passionate appeal to each Christian heart. Yet with all, and through it all, slumbered the fifty-two.

Ronald and I had had many talks of late—now that I had grown to be a great girl (ten years old on my last birthday)—about the injustice of the world at large, and the Wyanoake church in particular, as exhibited in their treatment of his father, Rev. Felix Hedden, A.M. and B.A., who would never be D.D. In the light of Ronald's representations of his parent's talents and learning, his industry and piety, and the bovine insensibility to these manifested by the people of his

charge, in such significant ways as small congregations, listless hearers, slighting mention of his best productions, and a beggarly salary, I regarded the slumberers as my personal foes, and construed their behavior into an insult to the dear man honored and revered above the rest of his sex, in his own home. I was very sorry for him, that Sabbath, that the sermon he had sat up all night to write should put everybody to sleep. I only hoped he did not notice this. He may have understood, through the medium of a sixth sense, what a slight they were putting upon him as Christ's ambassador. He certainly gained no information respecting their deportment by the seeing of the eye. To all appearance, he was as oblivious of them as they were of him. He had had the luxury of writing out what he thought and felt respecting the world's great festal day. I had sometimes, upon entering his study unperceived, beheld him wrapped in a very ecstasy of composition, his visage colored and illumined into what was, in my awe-struck eyes, the face of an angel; heard his quick pants while the pen flew from line to line, as of one who sees the jasper gate within reach of his eager hand; who takes in, in anticipation, great cooling draughts from the fountain rising under the Throne. I question not, knowing him as I subsequently learned to do, that there was positive pain in being thus obliged to submit his darling, born of that divine trance, to the inspection of those to whom her beauty was as naught.

“Seems as if he was afeard we might onderstan’

something what he said!" Ronald had once heard a rustic wag say; "so he kinder covers it all up and hides it away. Why don't he preach in Greek at onst?"

"As if *he* could comprehend my father's sermons, if he heard every word!" said the boy hotly, in comment.

I do not remember that I ever slept in church in my life. I am sure that my abhorrence of the bestial habit—(I mean what I say!)—dates from my childhood; that it grew and strengthened in watching the various phases of somnolency encouraged and indulged in by those who were the pillars of that little country church.

To begin with, there were such members of the Consistory as chanced to be out that day; two elders, and as many deacons, solemnly seated on the right and left of the pulpit.

Elder Sears made a business of his Sabbath snooze; setting his back against the wall, on which was a round, black spot exactly covered by his head when he thus availed himself of this sanctuary privilege; and facing the congregation with the serene air of one whose conscience was void of offence toward God and man, especially the man in the desk above him. If he loved the gates of Zion for no other reason, they would have been endeared to him by memories of the hebdomadal nap, unbroken by the jar and buzz of daily toil in the dwellings of Jacob, the noise of the hewing of wood and drawing of water, the bleatings of the flocks in the divisions of Reuben.

His younger neighbor yielded to the drowsy influ-

ence of place and season under protest feeble in quality, but perceptible, crossing and recrossing his legs, blowing a signal of distress into the scarlet depths of his pocket-handkerchief, and dozing for some minutes, with one eye open upon the Dominie, cocked wisely upward as if to warn that functionary that any lapse in doctrine, any ambiguity of expression would be pounced upon and "made a note of" by the vigilant warder of what he termed in prayer "these few sheep in the wilderness." Succumbing by and by, through the treachery of the flesh, he would shut both eyes, yet managed to maintain the semblance of rumination throughout repose so profound that he sometimes snored audibly.

Clearly, Elder Noyes was not a man to be trifled with or imposed upon by the most artful preacher who ever distilled poppy and mandragora syrup upon the lids of parishioner.

"Its amazin' how it purges and settles one's idees, if he'll jest shet his eyes for a spell!" he had said several times to his pastor. "If ever you git a leetle too deep for me, Dominie,—and there's no denyin' that you *do* go pretty deep sometimes,—I've jest got to close my eyes for a second, to excludde outside impressions, you know, and there you are—clear as a bell!"

The deacons, hard-fisted sons of toil, kept awake, as a rule, until after the collection immediately preceding the sermon was taken up. This done, each parted the skirts of his Sunday coat, took possession of his

lawful section of the pew, and deliberately addressed himself to the holy duty of physical repose. Their part of the day's performance was over. Haunted by no fear of call-boy or cue, they slept on their way rejoicing, usually with their mouths open, through division, sub-division, summing up, personal application, and concluding prayer; always coming up to time with an air of extreme edification and spiritual refreshment when the last hymn was given out.

"Fifty-two!" I had counted, groaning inwardly, when my attention was arrested by the novel spectacle—in winter time—of strange faces in the audience (?). Mr. Wagner, the rich man of the township, of which he was a native, although he had amassed his wealth as a city merchant, was in church with his wife and daughters—a noteworthy circumstance in itself, since he often preferred taking *his* Sunday nap at home. In his pew were likewise two lads or young men apparently seventeen or eighteen years of age. Their dress, the cut of their hair, and their general bearing proclaimed them members of a more refined if not a wealthier class than our country boys. Furthermore, both were wide awake. Better still, they were listening attentively to the sermon, and this while Mr. Wagner's bald head had fallen so low into his shirt-bosom that his bushy gray whiskers curled up over his chin and tickled his nose.

I studied the strangers' features and figures with the shrewd earnestness of a child to whom the sight of such was an event. One, I decided, had the loveliest

face I had ever seen on masculine shoulders, so mild were the beams of his large, dark eyes, so gentle was the expression that "abode like a bird of calm upon his lips." I borrowed the phrase for the occasion from my recollections of Gilfillan's "Bards of the Bible," which Ronald had read aloud lately to his mother while I helped her make over-sheets. We children at the parsonage, from knowing more books than people, had ways of thinking and talking that must have seemed quaint and high-flown to our associates. I found out very quickly whom the dark-eyed stranger resembled,—Sir Philip Sidney, with whom I had become familiarly acquainted through the benevolent agency of a yellow-leaved, much-bethumbed encyclopædia in the pastor's library.

"Sir Philip Sidney—brave and gallant knight!" I mused delightedly and bookishly, "and his companion must be a *fac-simile* of St. Clair in 'Dunallan.' Or a brigand. Maybe a corsair!" with a very vaporous conception of what either word really signified; only that they conveyed to my mind the impression of something dark, mysterious, and wicked.

Sir Philip's comrade, although a beardless boy, looked to me like a man who had a history, and in whose history was a mystery as well. His was the peculiar complexion between swarthiness and biliousness one naturally associates with residence in tropical and miasmatic regions. His hair was brown and lank; his nose decidedly aquiline; his retreating chin was redeemed from weakness by the very determined lines

of the mouth, and there was already a plait between his gray eyes. The longer I scanned him, effecting the scrutiny by means of furtive peeps from the deep retirement of my bonnet,—staring being reckoned unpardonable rudeness in our family code,—the less I liked him. When, sermon and prayer being ended, we stood up for the final hymn, and my corsair, straightening his long legs and body with a jerk, pulled down his vest and coolly wheeled half-way around in his place next the aisle to inspect church and congregation, I made up my mind that he could be quite as insolent and unscrupulous in villian'y as St. Clair, without being nearly so handsome. In fact, that he was not handsome at all, to my way of thinking.

In less time than it takes me to describe his mode of observation, and the offensiveness thereof, his cold, critical eyes had seen all that was humble and mean and neglected in the old stone church which “the members” liked to tell visitors was built before the Revolution, General Washington having once worshipped within it. A notable church-goer, in the midst of military duties, and of a most Catholic spirit, must his country’s father have been, if he attended divine service but once during the eight years’ war, in each of the sanctuaries of which such an interesting event is recorded. This was a clumsy but substantial structure. The walls were two feet thick. The plaster on the inside had been laid directly upon the rough-hewn stone, and was dropping away here and there, leaving the masonry exposed. The ceiling was un-

painted oaken boards, mellow brown with age; the galleries were of the same material and hue; the windows narrow and set high up in the walls, and the pulpit always reminded me—struggle though I did against the sacrilegious conceit—of a certain brown mustard-pot we had at home,—most forcibly when the preacher stood up within it, to represent the spoon. The strips of carpeting in the aisles were worn until a dingy dust-color had effaced the memory of their original pattern and dyes; those in the chancel and on the pulpit stairs were of different tints and designs. The fringe had fallen piecemeal from the Bible cushion, which, on being pounded, in the energy of his discourse, by a Methodist brother some weeks back, had rained down a shower of fluff, feathers, and dust upon the scandalized beholders. Scandalized,—not at the condition of the antiquated velvet pad which had never been plethoric, but that the reverend guest hit so hard. Elder Sears was awakened by the unseemly thump, and felt himself drawn out to rebuke the culprit at the close of the services.

“You’ve got a many things to learn, my young brother.” This was the form of his word in season. “One is—you can’t hammer sinners into the kingdom, no how you can work it. It is the flint and fire of the Sperrit that’s a-wantin’—not your thunder and lightnin’. Another is—you can’t mend things by pitchin’ into them. You only kick up a muss what chokes the people, and helps nothing.”

I give this as a representative anecdote of the Wyan-

oake church. I never saw people who were more averse to innovation, who were more willing to stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord — provided* they were not too fast asleep to look at it when it arrived.

St. Clair looked scornfully at the poor cushion, and at the two rusty stoves, with their stretch of rustier pipe running half the length of the building, and fastened to the ceiling by wires yet redder with the rust of many winters and summers; disgustfully at the wide, shallow boxes of sand in which the stoves were set, the surface of these being ornamented with quids of tobacco in various stages of desiccation. Then his supercilious regards rested upon the front pew he must have known for the pastor's, and upon the boy and girl who stood there.

Ronald was singing with all his soul—a bass which was wonderfully deep and clear for a lad of sixteen, and as wonderfully correct, for his mother was his preceptor in the art he loved. He did not glance at Mr. Wagner's seat, and, in the height of the distress that enveloped me like a hot and clinging fog, I was glad of this. It was enough, and more than enough, that I became suddenly and terribly conscious that my second-best church-dress, worn this lowering forenoon, from prudential considerations, was a faded, gray delaine, viciously fresh, however, where two tucks had been let out; that my shoes were muddy, my worsted gloves patched; my cloak too short in the waist and sleeves, and my bonnet an offence to eyes accustomed to city

fashions. I had but one comforting reflection in my sheepish agony. My right cheek was toward the gazer. I looked fixedly at a stain on the left-hand steps of the pulpit, keeping my left cheek entirely out of his sight.

At home, nobody ever alluded to the red "birth-mark" that disfigured it; but the pitying and curious stares of neighbors and strangers, and the blunt remarks of a few gossips, had taught me that the blot was a sad misfortune—an irreparable defect in a face that would else have been passable.

I stood thus for one minute, perhaps—that was like ten to me—before the fog parted and cooled; and although the perspiration still bedewed my forehead icily, I understood that the disdainful stare had left me—probably as a being beneath the young gentleman's further notice. Ronald sang on. I had heard nothing else while the bashful horror lasted, and, in its abatement, caught at my pride in him, in his virtues and accomplishments, as the best preventive to a relapse.

"No more let sin and sorrow grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground!
He comes to make his blessing flow,
Far as the curse is found."

"Far as the curse is found—is found." I can hear the pealing fugue now—stirring old "Antioch"—then quite a new tune in the Wyanoake musical repertory; the throbbing "brum-brum" of the sonorous voice close to me; the held-note of part after part; the sway and rise of the soprano (called "tribble" by our chorister),

which last was, I know, shrill to rasping. I regarded it then as a marvel of vocalization, and Miss Dorcas Vansart, who "did" most of it, as a prodigy.

Can twenty-five years have limped and slipped and fled by me since then, dividing me from that Past by a gulf so narrow that the Christmas song sounds less like an echo than present rejoicing—the voice of victory over slain evil and vanquished foes?

Ah's me! the growth of sin and sorrow goes on, and God knows how thickly the thorns spring about young and tender feet; how cruelly wound the hearts of those whom years should have made wise and strong; how the whole creation still groans and travails in pain, and the ages cry to succeeding ages, "What of the night?" not yet "What of the day?" And to the Ancient of Days—"Dear and pitying Lord! how long? how long?"

I think Ronald Hedden believed that the millennium (his second brother called it the *millen-deum*; and the Mother would not have the mistake corrected, saying that it meant the "thousand years of God," and was a better name than ours) was not far away, as he sang of blessings which were to spring up beneath the stately steppings of the Deliverer, until the blighted, sorrowful earth should blossom with roses, and all the trees of the field clap their hands. I am sure that he forgot, as I did presently, that his Sunday coat was shabby; that his shoes had been unskilfully cobbled, and that, with all his longings for learning and a career worthy, he would have said, of his father's son; with all his proud

dreads of patronage and pity, he was the eldest of five children born to a poor country dominie, whose basket was always light, and his store, at the best, discouragingly small. If the lad had been asked in what he trusted for the fulfilment of his dreams, he would have answered, unfalteringly, "In God and in myself." I had heard him say it, and it consoled me to recollect it as he took my hand to walk with me down the aisle after benediction. He had done this when I was first able to toddle to church; and neither of us reflected, while keeping up the habit, that he was no longer a child, nor I a baby.* He held my little worsted glove closely in his bare palm to-day; smiled brightly down at me, and I pressed my head to his sleeve in mute caressing, the more tender that my heart ached at the contrast between his attire and that of the strangers whose broadcloth Spanish cloaks, new and very imposing to me, brushed us in the doorway.

Mr. Wagner stopped us there.

"I want you young folks to come over to my house to-morrow night," he said, in his loud, pompous voice.

I have never known another man who made his house seem so palatial in the mere speaking of it.

"We're going to have a genuine Christmas frolic. Tell ma to fetch all the babies along, and to be sure she answers to roll-call herself, for we're depending on her for music. Don't be scared, Dominie, we ain't going to dance! If you don't believe me, come and keep us straight! People in these parts don't often see such a Christmas supper as my wife has been getting up for

week past. It's what you may call a bang-out stunner—a knock-down sockdologer! Got a house-full of company to feed, too. These college-boys are like a swarm of locusts. Here! you fellows there! Otis! Cromer!" to the youths who were putting Mrs. Wagner and her daughter into their carriage. "Want to introduce you to the Dominie and a small part of his family. Remember the old saying, Dominie, about ministers' riches?—'Wagon-load of children; wheel-arrow-load of books'?" laughing boisterously, and nudging the grave, spare man who was buttoning himself within an old surtout that made him look like a withered walnut before the husk is off, so loosely did it fit him.

"These chaps are my nephew, Otis Wagner, my mother's eldest hope, and his chum, Mr. Cromer—Seniors in college, both of 'em. Going to learn your trade some day, Dominie—that is, unless you've frightened them out of the notion by the almighty long sermon you gave us this morning. By the powers of mud and molasses!"—an oath which I am entirely willing to believe was of his own manufacture—"I thought you wouldn't hold up this side of the Judgment Day. It's high time that sort of weekly crucifixion had gone out of fashion everywhere!"

Dear me! how loud and vulgar he was, with all his money and fine carriage and talk of Christmas feasts! Yet the knot of farmers and farmers' families that stood by chuckled and tittered after each sentence. He set at defiance every rule of good breeding, trampled

upon the finest sensibilities of natures he was incapable of appreciating—but he was the richest man in the congregation; owned and paid annuities upon two middle aisle pews, and subscribed twenty dollars per annum toward “the salary.” If he had not purchased the right to speak his mind, who had? Even the scholarly pastor, although one of the least worldly of men, recognized, without knowing why he did so, that his wealthy neighbor was a privileged character; accepted the fact of his boorishness as part of the inevitable prickliness of the hair shirt of daily trial and vexation appointed unto him to wear. He smiled meekly—maybe weakly, also—in holding out his hand to the collegians.

I saw St. Clair, *alias* Otis Wagner, look at the darned cotton glove before he ostentatiously, as I fancied, drew off his furred gauntlet, and put his slender fingers within those of the country minister. Ronald’s hold upon mine tightened into a grip that hurt me. It was relaxed suddenly, as Mr. Cromer extended his hand to him with boyish frankness.

“We young people should not require an introduction. I hope to see a great deal of you during the holidays. Yours is a musical family, I hear, and music is one of my hobbies. You will be over to-morrow night, won’t you? Mr. Wagner tells me there is capital rabbit-shooting hereabouts. We ought not to talk of such things here—literally under the droppings of the sanctuary,”—changing his position, laughingly, as a drop of melted snow plashed from the eaves upon his hat,—

"but to-morrow evening we shall expect full information upon this and cognate subjects. City-bred boys are woefully ignorant about matters which you, who are so fortunate as to live in the country, learn by the time you can walk and talk."

Young Wagner raised his hat in punctilious civility as his uncle named Ronald, and the latter acknowledged the salute in like manner. But his cheek was darkly red, and his eyes flashed. He turned again instantly to Cromer with a pleasant phrase of welcome to the neighborhood, and a promise to do all in his power to make his sojourn among us agreeable.

"He"—and I did not mean Cromer—"can see from the way he acts and speaks that Ronald is no country bumpkin," thought indignant I, not staying to choose elegant terms. "What a disagreeable, conceited puppy he is!"

"As for this young one"—Mr. Wagner slipped his thick forefinger under my chin; pulled my poor, marred face up to the view of the friendly and the supercilious collegian—"she's a sort of stray kitten that found her way into the parsonage, and the dominie, not having children enough of his own, adopted her out and out. He wasn't satisfied with domestic goods, you see, so he went into the importing business. Haw! haw!"

"Ha ha!" and "He! he!" echoed the men and women within hearing of the delicate witticism.

I felt as if I were sinking into the ground with confusion, when the pastor drew me away from the dreadful man.

"She is the orphaned child of a very dear friend," he said in tender seriousness. "Besides her, we have no daughter in our earthly home. We thank the Father daily that she is with us."

And—"Come, May, dear! The Mother will be wondering what keeps us out so long!" added Ronald, the ring in his distinct articulation almost defiant. "Good-day, Mr. Cromer! Good-day, gentlemen!" raising his cap in a bow than which nothing could be grander in my eyes.

The sodden snow was six inches deep on the level, and as we trudged through it, along the footpath edging the road, Ronald treading broadly in advance that it might not quite bury my ill-shodden feet, and his father following us in Indian file, the Wagner carriage drove by with great flourish and dash, Mr. Wagner himself holding the reins, talking fast and noisily, and the wheels and hoofs throwing a shower of mud over us.





CHAPTER II.

CHRISTMAS DAY AT HOME.

THE Wyanoake parsonage was three-quarters of a mile from the church, an inconvenient arrangement for the present pastor, who could not afford to keep a horse.

But the land had been bequeathed for this purpose by a deceased parishioner of the last generation, who had cut off the three-cornered tract of six or seven acres on the roadside from his own farm, and thereby embalmed his name in the memory of a grateful posterity. At least, thus the then incumbent had declared in a funeral discourse delivered in the church where he had long been an Elder.

The panegyrist, following the benevolent parishioner to the silent congregation sleeping behind the stone church, ten years later, had not seen the corner-stone of the much needed manse laid. His successor was still in my day spoken of in the vicinity as "a smart man, but powerful restless in his ways." A revival had signalized the first year of his pastorate, and, taking advantage of

the impetus imparted to churchly interests by this, he had gone in person, from house to house, from hamlet to settlement, with a subscription-paper. He collected enough money to pay for the erection of a neat frame dwelling; superintended the builders until it was ready for his occupancy, although still deficient in the minor details of shutters and porches—(in neighborhood parlance, “stoops”)—and removed his family into their new quarters. Before the additional sum needed for the “improvements” just specified was raised, the restless man accepted an invitation to a languishing city church, which was calling vehemently, with the remains of its strength, for a “live preacher.”

By a somewhat singular coincidence, the husbandman under whose tillage the once goodly vine had sickened and dwindled was the Rev. Felix Hedden. He had been invited to take charge of the church, then wealthy and active, upon the earnest recommendation of his late preceptors in college and seminary. Their influence was backed by the relatives of his wife, a woman of great personal attractions and intellectual gifts—a “pastor’s lady” of whom the best people in his flock might be justly proud. It was well known that her family belonging to the old Knickerbocker stock, had opposed her marriage with Mr. Hedden, not scrupling to use their utmost efforts to sever the engagement formed while he was still a divinity student. But, since she had overridden their protest and set at naught their prudential counsels, it behooved the Van Coynes to give the shy, erudite bridegroom—endorsed by his pro-

fessors and classical examiners as a marvel of profound scholarship and in the use of the pen—a chance to show what he was made of. The Van Coynes had the gift of more than one church at their command as truly and absolutely as if the system of ecclesiastical benefices were recognized and legalized in republican New York.

(Lest the unsophisticated reader should imagine that the exercise of unlicensed power and unseemly diplomacy in affairs clerical has outlived that benighted age, I hasten to assure him that the abuses known as “rings,” and “corners,” and “wire pulling,” not to mention such unrefined and violent exertions as log-rolling, and puffing, and pushing, and hoisting, have neither name nor existence in the modern church. Least of all do they obtain in the venerable and stately denomination to which the Van Coynes lent lustre—and weight.)

They and the Reverend Professors and D.D.’s who had plumbed the depths of the man’s mind, and taken account of his mental stock, “hoisted” him into the pulpit of the flourishing metropolitan church. In six years’ time he had preached the congregation out-of-doors, himself out of the sculptured marble desk. His doom was written, and sealed, and recorded by this notable failure “to sustain himself.” He could never be a popular orator. Had he been a model pastor, he might yet have hoped for a recommendation to the mercy of some second-rate yet respectable people. But he was never so happy elsewhere as in his study ;

was ill at ease in fashionable society ; made no figure, unless it was a sorry cipher, at wedding and dinner parties ; was declared bankrupt in repartee and anecdote.

Altogether it was unaccountable why Katharine Van Coyne had married him ; a greater enigma that the Van Coynes had taken him up ; strangest of all that the High Avenue church had extended to him a call, and tolerated him for almost a decade. His wife's parents were dead, as was her only sister. Her brothers, heartily vexed and ashamed at the mortifying result of their patronage, washed their patrician hands of the unsuccessful man's affairs, and an old college mate, now an eminent divine, got for him the obscure position just vacated by the "live preacher."

Ronald was five years old when the Heddens came to Wyanoake. Two other children had been born to them in their town home, both of whom died during the first winter they spent among the snow-clad hills and bleak winds of the new parish. It was just after the burial of "the baby" that I, a sickly, wailing infant, was committed to the warmth and shelter of "the Mother's" bosom by the dearest friend of her girlhood, who had wedded unhappily, and, driven to distraction by the utter shipwreck of heart, hope, and faith, had found her way to Katharine and died in her arms. My foster-mother often talked to me of her who had just lived long enough to commit me to her love and care ; told me of her loveliness of character and person, and of the affection each bore the other,

and I prized more highly than the few trinkets that had been hers, and which were sacredly treasured for her child, a miniature she had given Katharine as a bridal-present.

Four children had appeared, at brief intervals, in the parsonage in the place of those who had passed on to eternal infancy and safety, and theirs were the faces we saw pressed against the dining-room windows, watching for our return as we neared home—theirs the shouts of welcome that called a smile of genuine pleasure to the careworn visage of the father. We entered through the front gate and door which was still porchless. This was one of the deviations from Wyanoake customs, the violations of Wyanoake prejudices, that had won for the Mother the reputation of “having fine lady-like ways.” Nearly every other house in the township was entered by the “home folks” at the side or back, wherever the kitchen happened to be located, this last being the heart, and centre, and continual abiding-place of the inmates from the first cool evenings of October to the latest fresh mornings and chill rains of April. No amount of neighborly kindness and sweetness of demeanor, nor the wisest economy in housewifery, could atone to the Wyanoakers for Mrs. Hedden’s steady persistence in the practice of eating and sitting in the dining-room. That the whole family gathered there at the beginning and the close of the day, and it was the mistress’ nursery and sewing-room all winter; that her garments and those of her children were the only ones that did not, on Sabbath, give

out freely in the sanctuary the smoky and greasy odor "set" in the best, as in the every-day suits of her neighbors, by much dwelling in an atmosphere impregnated with the reek of fried buckwheat cakes and pork, of cabbage and of onions, were grievous offences in the eyes of her rustic critics.

And had they not righteous cause of complaint, since part of the Dominie's salary was paid in fuel? It was equivalent to wasting the church substance for that shiftless man's extravagant wife to keep up two fires, when people who owned farms and houses and had money out at interest, thought themselves none too good to use their kitchens as living-rooms. Chamber fires were unknown except in cases of sickness. These we did without, also, but the younger children were dressed and undressed at the dining-room fire, always after the cloth was removed or before the table was set; another of the Mother's over-nice notions! Her care to avoid whatever could offend delicate tastes or stomachs was extreme, and seemed to the housewives of the region zeal without reason or excuse. Her children—so reported pitying spies into our domestic arrangements—were compelled to wash and comb their hair upstairs, whereas in other households the wash-hand-basin hung over the kitchen sink; the common comb was suspended by a string beside a bit of looking-glass, as near the cooking-stove as might be without hindrance to the culinary operations on the part of him who made use of these appliances to a decent toilette. It would have been useless to combat

the popular condemnation of Mrs. Hedden's squeamishness and city ways, by setting forth the facts that the winter's stock of fuel in the parsonage cellar and wood-yard was always made to last until spring ; that judicious management of the cooking-stove, the embers in which were allowed to die down to a faint handful between meals, supplied the material with which the obnoxious second fire was fed. Still less was it worth while to tell the censors that Ronald's hatchet and bill-hook provided for the air-tight wood-stove that warmed his father's study in the second story.

There were three rooms on the first floor—a parlor, seldom used in cold weather, but where, to the scandal of the careful *yfrows* of the section, the Mother sat on summer afternoons, work in hand and babies about her knees ; the kitchen across the hall, and adjoining it the dining-room, of fair proportions, with windows that looked out on three sides—across, and up, and down the valley. Into this apartment Ronald led me, the Mother meeting me on the threshold with a kiss that thrilled in grateful warmth all through my shivering body.

“My love, you are blue with cold. I have been sorry, all the forenoon, that I let you go. The snow-air is very penetrating. Take her to the fire, my son.”

The soft melody of her voice, made more musical by the purity of her articulation and pronunciation, exceeded in sweetness any other I ever heard—that I

ever expect to hear until the angel's welcome blesses my ears. That we were very poor; had to wear faded and patched clothing, and feed usually upon coarse fare, were to her arguments in favor of her plan of training us to be gentlefolks ingrain, in the exercise of all Christian graces of speech and deportment.

Ronald, her true and loyal son, obeyed, seating me in a cushioned rocking-chair, taking off my hat, cloak, and gloves—lastly, marking that I winced as he accidentally touched my foot, dropping on his knee to untie and remove my shoes. They were sodden and limp, and my stockings were saturated.

"Mother," he called, "look at this! And the patient little creature has not complained by so much as a sigh or frown. Where must I look for dry stockings?"

He—we all saved her useless steps whenever we could, it was such joy to serve her.

She directed him where to find the desired articles, and herself drew the wet hose from a pair of feet I would fain have concealed, the exposure of which I tried to avert by begging that she would let me wait on myself.

"My child!" she exclaimed, at sight of what I had tried to keep from her knowledge for a fortnight past. "My dear May, why was I not told of this?"

For the quivering members were mottled with chilblains, sore and swollen to a degree that made even her handling torture. I was mortified that I could not help crying when I saw the tears roll down her face, and

drop upon the feet she cradled in her lap until Ronald returned.

"They are not so very bad," I said. "Not nearly so painful as they were last winter. It is the snow-water that makes them burn and smart. I didn't tell you, mamma, because I was afraid it would grieve you, and indeed I have been able to bear it very well until now."

"My children's sufferings belong of right to me also," was the answer. "You must remember this, dear, and not cheat me again."

I did not doubt her sincerity then, but neither did I enter into the deeps and fulness of her meaning. It was love than which the Master had said there is none greater possible to humanity.

She anointed my feet with some cooling unguent, bound them up in soft linen, and bade Ronald lay me upon the lounge, where I reclined in luxurious laziness all dinner-time, envying no princess her royal state and service.

We always kept Christmas at the parsonage, looking forward to it with as much delight as if presents of jewelry, plate, and elegant apparel were then to be our portion in lieu of the home-made toys, the cheap book and package of confectionery each of us juniors had drawn from his and her stocking that morning. We had a genuine Christmas dinner too, and were all in holiday attire. When seated about the table, the children formed a group of which, I thought within my unchildlike self, any parent might be proud. Felix,

fair and sunny-haired, with a laugh always lurking in his blue eyes, and a saucy cleft in his chin, was next his father. By him was Albert, eighteen months younger, dark and thoughtful-looking, a great reader and dreamer. Baby Harry, two years old, was between the Mother and Ronald. Next the latter, Mark, a miniature of the eldest brother. The two who died had been the only daughters of the household until I came. The feast, like the gifts, was mainly of domestic manufacture. Ronald had fattened two of his flock of turkeys for family use—one for Thanksgiving, the other for Christmas—and sold nine in the nearest market-town. The vegetables were from our garden, which was laid out by the Mother and worked by her boys; the eggs and milk for the pudding from our poultry-yard and cow-shed; the currants dotting it were dried by Mrs. Hedden, as were the cherries that did duty as raisins. One foreign luxury graced the board—a cup of strong, fragrant coffee, brought on with the dessert, and set beside Papa's plate by the Mother.

She bent over and kissed his forehead in putting it down.

"My Christmas surprise to you, dearest. Would it were worthier!"

He put his arm about her, held her for a moment, his eyes bright and large, the sensitive curves of his lips saying more than did his tongue.

"Cleopatra's dissolved pearl was not a more precious draught. *Lachryma Christi* was never more sweet."

When she had resumed her seat at the head of the board, he raised the cup.

“Health, happiness, and length of days to the Mother!”

It was his name for her always, in speaking to us, and we used it freely and lovingly in our prattle with one another.

What a merry meal that was! Papa told funny stories of his boyhood, and the Mother pretty ones of the days when she was a girl, and the old Dutch holiday customs were not considered vulgar and puerile; of the pranks played by her brothers, and the dolls’ tea-parties given by her sister and herself. Through all the talk there ran, like a tiny but strong golden thread, the acknowledged memory of the Event that crowned the outgoing of the year with solemn gladness. Both parents referred frequently and gratefully to the world’s great Christmas Gift, but with a difference in manner and phraseology. The father spoke as of One whom, not having seen, he loved; the Mother as if she had sat at meat with Him but an hour ago, as if His birth in the stable, His infancy in Egypt, His boy-life in the carpenter’s shop in Nazareth, were things of yesterday, a wonder still too new not to be the theme of every tongue. Lying among my soft, warm pillows, and watching her noble face, I could guess with unfailing accuracy, from the dawning of a peculiarly sweet and reverent smile in her eyes, when she was about to name Him in whom her soul delighted. We were used to such conversation,

nor, in our seclusion from even so much of the world as was bounded by our hills, suspected that the like was seldom heard in other and Christian families.

"I don't believe the President has a jollier Christmas than we are having," said Felix, rightly named, since face and nature were alike happy, "nor a better dinner."

"Of course he hasn't," retorted Albert, indignantly. "Didn't the Mother cook it—every bit?"

"You are right there, my man," answered Papa. "Money cannot hire such a housekeeper or cook."

"Al and I set the table," Felix went on, radiantly. "Mother let us handle her real cut-glass goblets, and the China plates Uncle Ronald had made for her in China when she was married, because she said we were such careful boys. She wouldn't trust servants with them if she had them, she said. So you see, Papa, money cannot hire such waiters!". drawing himself up grandly, and imitating his father's tone so faithfully that everybody laughed—Papa less merrily than the rest.

"When you were married, dear!" he repeated, a look in his eyes we did not comprehend. "Cut-glass and china were every-day matters with you then."

She answered, partly in words, partly by the smile, free and cordial as forced smiles can never even seem to be.

"'A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he hath,' much less a woman's! We are rich people, Papa; rich, happy, and thankful!

I wonder if Mary anticipated, when she said, as her Boy's birthday came round, again and again, 'One year nearer manhood,' that the day would be kept throughout all time! I hope she did, for she was so much poorer than we are, that her heart must have ached, sometimes, because she had so few gifts to offer Him, and these were so mean in comparison with what she felt were His deserts."

"I wiss," began Mark, with wide, serious eyes, and an earnest quaver in his voice; "I wiss I had lived in the next house to His; I would have given him half my candy, and let Him ride my hobby!"

Said "hobby" was a nankeen horse's head, fashioned by the Mother's skill, and fastened to a long stick.

"Harry would, too!" lisped baby's sweet mouth. "And mine gingerbread—all of it! *evelly* bit!"

"I know you would, my darlings." The Mother's eye rebuked the smile on Felix's face. "Because mother's boys love the dear Jesus."

The father said something in an unknown tongue, which, I learnt subsequently, was a quotation in the original from the prophecy of perfected praise out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. The Mother understood him, and was well pleased that she had led the talk away from the reminiscence which had shadowed the face she loved best and studied most constantly. It flowed on again, a shining, rippling stream, while our feast progressed. Ronald had stored up apples and nuts for dessert. To these Mrs. West, our nearest neighbor, had added a pumpkin pie, and Mrs.

Wagner a mince pie, with a jar of preserves. We lingered about the table—or the rest did. I had my dinner set out in enchanting mimic array, upon a stand by my lounge.

When the meal was over, it was time for Papa to go to his afternoon service. This was a prayer-meeting at a farm-house “up the mountain,” a mile and more distant.

“There will not be six people there besides the family and yourself, sir,” expostulated Ronald. “Surely you are entitled to a half holiday.”

“I must go, my boy,” was the laconic reply.

The Mother helped her husband put on the overcoat she had warmed for him, tied his woollen scarf about his neck, and reminded him to wear his rubbers.

“Don’t make it harder for him to leave us than it must be in itself,” she said, blithely, to Ronald. “Let us be thankful that this is not the day for Wawsett; that he has not to walk six miles instead of three!”

She attended him to the door, and returning to the warm room, with a shiver that shook smile from lips and eyes, stood at the window, watching him tramp through the damp snow until he was out of sight. Then she gave a look to the low-hanging clouds on the hill-tops, and at the watery west, and sighed very softly. Only I, of her earthly friends, caught the whisper following the sigh :

“‘In paths which they have not known.’ What need that we should, since both way and end are known to Thee !”

After that, hers was the lightest step and most cheerful voice in the little party that speedily restored the two rooms to their accustomed orderly aspect.

Ronald wound his arm about her, the tall son whose head was on a level with hers, as they stood side by side on the hearth.

"Mother, dear! leave the children's Sunday lessons to me, and go to father's study, where I have just built a rousing fire—a genuine Christmas blaze—and read and rest until he comes home. To please *me*, motherdie!"

"You could offer me no more acceptable treat, my son, if I were sure it was not an imposition upon your good-nature—"

He checked the demur promptly, and carried her off with him, reappearing below, presently, with a countenance so bright, that I could not help saying: "The Mother will enjoy her nice resting-spell, Ron. I am glad you could give it to her!"

The little ones were setting their chairs in a semi-circle about the fire with some clatter and a great buzz—getting ready "to play Sunday-school." Ronald's eyes were hazy while he feigned to be engaged in tucking the shawl over me.

"You can't guess—I suppose neither of us can know—how much better than a 'resting-spell' this quiet Sabbath afternoon is to her. It is time for reading and for thinking—the sort of thinking other people call prayer! I saw the light of the PRESENCE upon her face as I stole away on tiptoe. For it was holy ground, Maysie!"

I never repeated such talk as this, although he had not enjoined secrecy upon me. I was older than my years in spiritual comprehension, and he had no other confidante except the Mother, to whom he could not speak of her goodness.

Happily, smoothly, and to me in delicious dreaminess went on that Sabbath afternoon. It was a novel and delightful experience—this playing invalid, unmolested by the thought of duties unperformed. My feet were very sore, but there was consolation in the stiffness and burning I felt whenever I moved them. The pain assured me of my right to be still and build castles in the air. Such innocent cloud architecture as I then reared I shall never raise again. The chateaux of riper years must be based upon what we deem is probability; be defined in boundary and height by place and circumstance. In painting my Utopia at that day, I laid all lands and zones under contribution. Palm-trees, apple-orchards, and orange-groves; bulbuls and robins; magnolias and trailing arbutus, peaches, mangoes, strawberries, and dates were in my garden of delights. There were beds of violets under nutmeg and clove-trees, while glaciers and cascades lent grandeur to the scene. To people this land I collected *dramatis personæ* whose association with one another was not only incongruous, but achieved by a series of anachronisms that would have made my scholarly guardian stare in horrified doubt of my sanity.

The boys thought I had fallen asleep, and spoke more

guardedly, almost whispering to one another over the fire, on which Ronald now and then laid a stick, the blaze of which showed me the eager faces of his auditors and his own—very like his mother's. Outside the window the wind hummed ceaselessly, but not sadly. Meanwhile the father, in the cheerless "best room" of the farm-house over the hill, talked to and of his Master in language little understood or heeded by the drowsy rustics about him, and the Mother in the upper chamber, the name of which, on that afternoon, was assuredly "Peace," sat at His feet learning yet more of the better part that, to the world she had left, was poverty, failure, and a wearing cross.

"The short and simple annals of the poor!" Do I dwell too much and too fondly upon these? Is the story of that uneventful Christmas Day in the parsonage among the mountains interesting to none but myself, whose eyes brim and whose heart softens in recalling its incidents, one by one, and the emotions to which they gave birth? It seems in the retrospect such a pure, pastoral life we led in the dear home-nest others called mean and crowded, that I could find it in my heart to forgive the Wyanoake congregation the slights, and pinchings, and patronizing regard which were their pastor's portion, but for the reflection that if through their agency we learned some of the sweet uses of adversity, theirs was unintentional benevolence.

I have said that the day was uneventful. This is hardly true, for the Mother marked it in the family calendar by singing for us the new hymn she had

promised the children for Christmas. We had no children's psalmody in those days, except Watts' "Divine Songs and Hymns," to which excellent piece of pious machinery the Mother did not affectionately incline. So in the dearth of "Pure Gold," and "Happy Voices," and "Songs of Salvation," and the hundred other sacred song-books with which the press now teems, and of which the generation soon tires, our hymns were like most other of our chief pleasures, home made.

We were all sitting about the hearth after tea. The lamp had been extinguished less from economical consideration than through liking for the warmer and richer light, shooting in long, tremulous gleams, over the group. Papa had his corner easy-chair; his head rested, not in dejection, but thought, upon his hand; his chilled and wearied feet, encased in list slippers, were upon the fender. Mark had climbed to Ronald's knee. Felix and Albert, the inseparables, sat on low crickets side by side. Baby Harry, sleepy and night-gowned, leaned his curly head against the Mother's shoulder, while she rocked him to rest. I, from my lounge, was watching the scene and hearing the drizzle of the rain against the windows, when the Mother, without lifting her cheek from Harry's chubby face, began her hymn—the same with which I, yesternight beguiled Ronald's youngest boy to slumber:

Sweetly sing the love of Jesus !

Love for you, and love for me ;

Heaven's light is not more cheering,

Heaven's dews are not more free.

As a child in pain or terror,
Hides him in his mother's breast,
As a sailor seeks the haven,
We would come to Him for rest.

Softly sing the love of Jesus !
For our hearts are full of tears,
As we think how, walking humbly
This low earth for weary years,
Without riches, without dwelling,
Wounded sore by foe and friend,
In the garden, and in dying,
Jesus loved us to the end !

Gladly sing the love of Jesus !
Let us lean upon His arm.
If He love us, what can grieve us ?
If He keep us, what can harm us ?
Still He lays His hands in blessing
On each timid little face,
And in heaven the children's angels
Near the throne have always place.

Ever sing the love of Jesus !
Let the day be dark or clear,
Every pain and every sorrow
Bring His own to Him more near.
Death's cold wave need not affright us,
When we know that He has died,
When we see the face of Jesus
Smiling on the Other Side !



CHAPTER III.

MY FIRST PARTY.

THE preparations for it had actually begun. My shoes were brushed ; the ruffle of real lace basted in the neck of my high-bodied, long-sleeved, black silk gown, which, it is superfluous to say, was one of the Mother's, turned, sponged with potato water on the wrong side, pressed out, and made over for me ; clean stockings and underclothing laid in my bedroom, in which, in consideration of the importance of the event, a fire was kindled. The sight of the blaze stealing up against the back of the chimney, made the occasion seem yet more solemn. A bedroom fire was associated in my imagination with domestic ills, sickness and births, and state visits from distinguished people. I moved about on tiptoe ; sat very upright and grave in a high chair, while the Mother braided my hair and tied it with pink ribbon. Then she left me to complete my toilette for myself, while she made herself ready in her own chamber.

Behold me, presently, tall and lank for my ten years,

the black silk buttoned up to the top, my tight sleeves untrimmed except for the puffed "cap" at the shoulder; my skirt falling plain and full to my ankles. I appeared well to my partial eyes, as I surveyed the modest figure in the looking-glass, and soliloquized concerning it, in my quaint, bookish way. Elegant simplicity was my *forte*, I said, since I had no jewels in hair, or upon wrists, or about the throat, which, I did not remark, was too thin to look in the least like the ivory or marble columns to which those of my favorite heroines were likened. I was glad my hair was smooth and dark, and that I had the bright ribbon; glad the Mother had told me the silk was a good one, and would last me a great while; exceeding glad of the precious bit of lace I could see for myself was rich and delicate. I loved pretty things with all my heart. There was positive enjoyment in passing my finger-ends up and down my skirt; music in what I knew enough of "Poe's Raven" to characterize as the "silken, soft, uncertain rustle" of the breadths as I shook them out. I practised postures before the glass,—innocently enough, since it was to assure myself that I would enter the festal hall with easy grace. I thought in stilted phrase while rehearsing my curtsey, of the air of calm self-possession with which I would follow the Mother as she moved with a regal air down the apartment. What apartment, and why she was thus to move or glide or pace along the entire length thereof, did not occur to me. I had lost sight of the Wagners as our entertainers, and of their big,

square, best room, with the Brussels carpet and hair-cloth sofas and chairs and mahogany tables, as the scene of the projected revels. Pavilion and guests, as pictured by my fancy, belonged rather to the gilded and domed and tapestried magnificence of the Louis Quatorze age than a hillside township in the New World, where the Reformed Dutch church was rooted and grounded by custom, although not by law.

The boys danced and shouted in a ring about my pleased, bashful self when I showed my magnificence below stairs—Felix venturing the assertion that I would “outshine the Wagner girlites all to pieces,” and good Mrs. West, who had volunteered to “keep house while the Dominic’s folks took their outing,” averring that the silk dress was “astonishing becoming to me,” and that “Miss Hedden was a dabster at making new clothes out of old.”

Mr. Wagner had sent his roomy family carriage for us, and inside rode the Mother, Papa, Ronald, and I. The night was intensely cold. Rain and snow had frozen into rock, and the clouds been swept off the face of a winter sky as cold and severe, by the strong wind that had poured all the day upon the valley through the Northern gorge. The clink of the horses’ hoofs upon the road was like the ring of iron against flint; a hollow rumble followed the wheels; clumps of cedars and hemlocks, and broadly branching pines with shadows blacker than themselves, showed sharply against the white slopes of the uplands, and in the frosty moonlight the mountains arose, still and grand, to the heavens.

Within the carriage, which was as splendid to me as is the Lord Mayor's coach to a country-bred lad on his first trip to "Lon'on," nobody talked much. Papa had pulled his hat over his eyes, a certain indication with him of a profound abstraction he would not have broken in upon. The Mother sat upright; her features, distinct in the combined radiance of the moon and snow, so mild in their seriousness that no one could have guessed from their expression how distasteful was the duty appointed for the evening. Ronald may have had his misgivings as to this, and the share of enjoyment that would be his, but he kept his own counsel, returning the squeeze I gave his hand when we came in sight of the lighted mansion, and smiling indulgently on me.

For I was in a quiver of delicious excitement. My teeth chattered as with cold; my blood was on fire; every nerve was thrilling like an *Æolian* wire in a West wind. At last I was about to see life! the gay, free, beautiful existence I had read of as a round of pleasure,—an intoxicating whirl of delight. The brown chrysalid was bursting into a butterfly. I could have screamed in ecstasy as our carriage—(I called it thus to myself, to try how the phrase would sound)—swept around the semicircle of the drive leading to the pillared porch—(I said this, too)—drawing up at the steps with a prodigious clatter. It was exactly like a chapter in a book thus far. Dizzily I alighted, crossed the piazza and traversed the hall, illuminated by a swinging lamp I had never seen lighted until now;

was led upstairs by the Mother to Mrs. Wagner's chamber. An immense four-poster of a bedstead draped with furniture calico, highly glazed and gorgeous in design and dye, was at the back of the room, and received our humble wraps. Then we stood for a few moments by such a rollicking, laughing, wide-awake fire that I mistook the polished brass knobs of the fender and the bald heads of the fire-dogs for pure gold, and bethought me lazily of the knobs overlaid with the precious metal that graced Solomon's temple.

We were among the first arrivals. Mr. Wagner stood upon the hearth-rug in the parlor, before a glowing grate, roasting his back and the hands crossed behind him, his coat-skirts being tucked under his arms. Three ladies sat firmly in chairs drawn up in line to the left, their spines disdaining support, their feet planted squarely on the carpet. As many men were miserable in the same style on the host's right. Mrs. Wagner,—a little woman with a white face and eyebrows, and a timid air, advanced to meet us with a look of evident relief at the sight of the "Dominie's wife," who could entertain company so much better than she. She shook hands with the rest of our party and kissed me.

"Rosa and Bella will be down presently, dear," she said, kindly. "They are lazy girls!"

"'Pon my soul!" chimed in—or over—her husband, for he drowned her hesitating accents, "I think the complaint is catching! Where in thunder are those college chaps? Ah, Cromer! here you are to answer

for yourself!" as this one of his guests entered. "As for Otis, his comb wants cutting! I shall give him to understand that I don't pay his college bills for the express purpose of making a dandy do-nothing of him. Not but what he's a confounded smart fellow"—to the circle at large. "His professors all tell me the same story. If he hadn't been a genius, I wouldn't have put my hand into my pocket to the tune of near a thousand a year to give him a chance in life, I can tell you. My brother has a swarm of younger brats, and has been unfortunate in business besides—and blood's thicker than water. I'd a sight rather the boy had taken to some other profession—saving your presence, Dominie! The ministry is a starving trade, as a rule—eh, Mrs. Dominie? But my nephew says very sensibly that a man can rise in it faster without capital than in any other. He's a keen-witted young dog!" wagging his huge head in vivacious appreciation of his *protégé's* talents. "He won't spend *his* days in a country parsonage, you may bet your life on that!"

I had slipped into a corner by this time, forgetful of prearranged postures and conversation. I invariably shrank into less than nothingness in Mr. Wagner's presence. He was so big, and had such a deafening voice, and could—did say such uncomfortable things. There was an ottoman in the corner, and a friendly fold of Mrs. Wagner's red damask curtains could be drawn across it to form a screen for one little girl. Thus ensconced, I became the spectator of the ceremony of arrival and reception; and fell, forthwith, into my beloved habit

of "making believe." By this process I made over mansion and party to the lady dressed in a flowered gray silk—altogether out of fashion, but this I did not suspect—with a small lace cap half veiling her hair banded with silver, who moved from group to group with gracious notice for all. The Dominie was the learned Erasmus ; Ronald, a prince of the blood ; Mr. Wagner was Dr. Samuel Johnson, of whose personal appearance and habits I had read in the Encyclopædia. My puppets were named without much study or delay, and I was so interested in their movements as not to feel as an affront, Rosa's and Bella's failure to approach or notice me. They were very gayly dressed indeed, in light-blue silks—changeable or chameleon lines flickering over them in a wonderful way when they moved—flounced up to the waists. I supposed that was the reason why there was not enough material left for high waists and whole sleeves. Their tresses were mops of curls which they tossed continually. For a while everybody talked to everybody else excepting myself, and nobody but the Dominie and his wife appeared to listen. I rather liked the hubbub. It agreed well with my preconceived notions of "wassail" and "revelry by night," and the "merry din" that beat in jocund surges upon the ear of the "next of kin" in "Ye Ancient Mariner." Mr. Wagner was very busy and very vociferous in bidding all about him "behave as if they were at home ; not to be shy ; but to have a high old time. By the powers of mud and molasses! where was the use of a fellow's having his pockets full

of tin and a thundering big house, if he couldn't make his friends enjoy themselves!"

I observed that he was missing very often, but only for a minute or so each time, and that he always re-appeared from the direction of a certain back room leading in some of his masculine guests in a mysterious, confidential manner, highly significant, no doubt, to the initiated, and very puzzling to me. It was after one of these visits that, wiping his mouth with his hand, he called to his daughters to "come and bang some music out of the new piano."

"A Christmas gift!" he explained audibly to all. "The old one was good enough for chits who are hardly in their teens, but they turned up their noses at it for a rattle-trap. So, Mrs. Dominie, you must spur them up well with their lessons; give them their money's worth of teaching. Come along here, girls! I want that duet, or quartette, or whatever you call it, you are everlastingly tinkling over. Now, whack away! Give the key-board *Jessie!*"

While the hopeful musicians obeyed, I had a chance to inspect Otis Wagner (St. Clair) more closely than I would have dared to do had he been aware of my scrutiny. His air of disdainful weariness was something novel to me, as was the lofty coolness, that kept even his boisterous uncle enough in awe of the stripling, whose college bills he paid, to repress in his presence all reference to his dependent condition. The senior never bullied the "smart young dog," or selected him as the direct butt of his refined witticisms. This I was

quick to note ; also, that the genius considered his present associates unworthy of propitiatory notice. He talked a good deal with Mr. Cromer, and during the "duet" they were right before me—so near I could hear every word they uttered.

"From the country, from clodhoppers and rural festivities, from my uncle and his urbanities, good Lord, deliver us!" was the first sentence I heard, at the which my flesh crawled and my hair stiffened. Had not his uncle expressly stated that he was a student of divinity?

Mr. Cromer did not seem horrified at the blasphemous travestie. Probably he was used to it from this source.

"Now, *I* like it!" he said, sunnily. "I have met several very interesting people here to-night. Mr. Hedden and his family, for instance. It is inexplicable that a man of his ability and scholarship should be allowed to bury both in this remote corner of creation. It is like finding a diamond in a plough-furrow."

He had a remarkably pleasant voice ; his articulation was peculiar—had in it something of the artlessness of a child's. These were very agreeable to me always, and never more attractive than when he thus praised my beloved foster-father.

"The ploughmen hereabouts would, I suspect, be devoutly thankful for the opportunity to toss the diamond into some other field," retorted Otis, with a low, disagreeable laugh. "Am I right, uncle"—as that worthy halted beside him—"in supposing that your congrega-

tion would not be afflicted beyond measure, were my friend Cromer to become the instrument—under Providence, of course—of removing your spiritual guide to another portion of the vineyard?”

“We’d vote him a pension!” clapping the young man on the back. “But there’s no such luck in store for this God-forsaken corner of Zion! He’ll stay here till he dies. The call of Death is the only one he will ever get, and that will be plaguy slow in coming. There’s no way of getting rid of him while he is alive. That’s one almighty mean dodge in the constitution of our church. If a pastor chooses to fasten himself upon a congregation, there’s no means, short of murder, of shaking him off. If we turn ugly and refuse to pay his salary, he can recover his dues by law. Now here’s Dominic Hedden! He’s driving his people into other churches by the dozen; hasn’t the knack of making himself popular in or out of the pulpit; just hangs on us like a leech, fattening while we are growing weak! By George! if I was a regular church-member, I’d be voted into the Consistory double-quick, and try how a notice to quit would act!”

“Yet there were admirable points in his discourse of yesterday,” observed Cromer, deprecatingly. “It does seem as if there ought to be a niche for him somewhere in the church.”

“You couldn’t name it right away, could you?” returned Mr. Wagner, jocosely. “If you can, we’ll chuck him into it, instanter! If he preached in Feejee, ’twould be as edifying to this congregation as his

sermon yesterday was. And the man has no style in him! He's just a slouchy, shiftless bookworm, as blind to common-sense ways of talking and doing as a four-day-old puppy!"

"His wife must have been good-looking in her day," said Otis, suppressing a yawn.

"Was a beauty, I've heard!" Mr. Wagner affirmed succinctly. "A Van Coyne. Had thousands spent on her education! Look at her now! Is thankful to teach my daughters music at ten dollars a quarter for the two. Has to hob-nob with every ploughboy and washerwoman she meets, for fear somebody may get mad and leave the church, and the Dominie's salary be less by a dollar and a quarter a year. Has a crib full of young ones, and cuts up her wedding silks for that foundling she's undertaken to bring up. It's a dog's life. I'm going to make her sing now. She's a real warbler, I can tell you."

He bustled off.

"A hard, hard case!" said Cromer, warmly. "There is something radically wrong in church and society, Wagner, when the only barrier between starvation and such a man and such a woman, is the threadbare toleration of a handful of ignorant rustics, who, by their organization into a church, are constituted the controllers of their superiors' fate. Yet what can he do?"

"Starve! or if that be too tedious, cut the throats of his wife and children, and then blow his own brains out. My benevolent uncle would cheerfully defray the funeral expenses. The truth is, not one man in

ten thousand knows when to die. I've heard the whole history of this one. If he had known the things that belonged to his peace he would have poisoned himself secretly the day after he was called to the High Avenue church. It is an illustration of the old fable of the cow jumping over the moon. She had to come down on the other side, and such very little dogs as the Wyanoakers—my revered relative heading the pack—laugh to see the sport. Seriously, the only 'niche' in this world which your reverend friend will ever fill creditably is the narrow trench appointed unto all the living. His eccentricities of manner and speech are such as no congregation can bear with patiently, and the same would make him odious to a class in college or seminary. He is too unsophisticated for the editorial office, too prolix—maybe too profound—for successful authorship, even if theological literature paid, which it does not. He hasn't enough physical force for ditching or breaking stones; no knack for and no experience in mercantile life—and he is fifty years old. There is no 'vacancy' for him in the church militant; the 'world' would spue him out of its month. Q. E. D."

The Mother began to sing, and they drew nearer to the piano. I shrank back entirely into the shelter of the curtain, pulled it over my head to hide my misery, and cried bitterly.

If an imaginative, I was also a credulous child. The statements and conclusions of uncle and nephew seemed to me terribly logical. I accepted the latter

with a difference in the premises. The man they slandered was, to me, gifted beyond the rest of his kind—was good, noble, learned, and eloquent. Because he was so far superior to the common herd, they turned from the pearls he cast before them to rend him. The Scripture imagery came patly to fan the flame of my wrath and grief. Did the Mother know what fate menaced her husband and her nurslings? I could never tell her if she did not; could not stab her heart with the fell dread that festered in mine.


Did God know? Did He, the loving Father who listened to the raven's cry, whose mercy unto them that feared Him was from generation to generation, whom my parents served with their whole hearts, taking joyfully the spoiling of their goods, counting all things but loss that they might win Christ and commend His love to others—did He care that we perished?

Otis Wagner's "Q. E. D." meant little to him and less to his fellow-student. For the hour it made an infidel of me—a raging, desperate, and, so far as my puny strength went, a dangerous rebel against the All-Father—an Ishmaelite to all of my kind who were that night to sleep without the parsonage walls.



CHAPTER IV.

CARL.

HOM have we here?" Why, it is the little lady I saw in church yesterday! And crying! No wonder! I should cry too if nobody had invited me in to supper. But that was the fault of the window-curtain."

I would have run away when the crimson folds were pulled aside, but strong, kind hands held me.

"There's nobody here but our two selves—you and I—so tell me all about it," continued the pleasant voice, whose owner I had not dared to face. "My name is Carl Cromer. And yours?"

"May Hedden," I said, strangling a fresh sob, and wiping my flooded cheeks with my mite of a pocket-handkerchief—already soaked through.

Mr. Cromer produced his—cool, fine linen—dried my eyes, put back and smoothed my tangled hair.

"There! we are all right again. Now we will go into the supper-room. The rest are not half through, and there is enough on the table for an army's winter

supplies. I know by the color of your eyes that you like oysters. Am I right?"

I could not but smile at his whimsical accent and face, and nodded assent.

"I was sure of it! Then, there's jelly in bushel bowls, shaking all over for fear you and I are coming to eat it up. And mountains of ice-cream! I'll make another guess. I never saw a little girl, with a mouth shaped like yours, who wasn't fond of ice-cream. Right again—eh? Now for one more. I guess that brother of yours—Ronald—is the nicest boy in the world. Aha! I hit it then too, I see. He has been hunting high and low for you. I dare say, if the truth were told, that he has just let the bucket down into the well, thinking that you may have jumped in, as the goat did, after the round moon in the bottom, which he—the goat—mistook for a cheese. I'll tell you the whole story after supper. Here is Ronald himself. We were coming to look for *you*."

"Maysie, darling! what is it?" queried Ronald, anxiously scanning my swollen eyes and discolored face. "The chilblains again?"

"Chilblains!" ejaculated Mr. Cromer, with a wry face. "I had them when I was a boy. Terrible things they are. I have a plan. We will take her up to my room, where we will find a comfortable easy-chair and a roaring fire. And I'll bring her a famous supper. What larks! Come along!"

They made a cat's cradle of their arms, and bore me up the staircase merrily and safely. We met nobody,

but from the supper-room issued a great hubbub—talking and laughing, and much clinking of crockery, glass, and spoons—Mr. Wagner's stentorian tones rising above the rest. All this made me faint and giddy; and when Mr. Cromer, having settled me to his satisfaction, burying me in shawls and propping my feet upon a low chair, had gone down for the promised refection, I threw my arms about Ronald's neck, as he knelt to remove my shoes, and sobbed piteously:

"It isn't the chilblains at all—that is, I don't mind them very much. It's only that I wish I hadn't come. And I thought parties were such pleasant things."

A simple plaint that has recurred to me often and how forcibly since!

"Rosamond and the purple jar?" said Ronald, compassionate, yet playful.

"Something like it," I confessed. "But—"

"But what?" looking up keenly.

"Nothing!" as Mr. Cromer's step resounded in the hall.

He was staggering under a waiter he had loaded with his own hands. While he arranged the contents upon a small table in front of me, I had leisure to think over how lucky it was I had not gone on to say that my trial would have resembled Rosamond's more nearly, had she been compelled to drink the "dark, disagreeable stuff."

Behold me, at length, enthroned and tended in a style that would have wrought in me wildest delight had I pictured it to myself beforehand—my cavaliers

vieing with one another in waiting upon and petting me ; carving my meat, holding, the one a cup of coffee upon my right, the other a plate of oysters on my left ; carrying on, the while, a running fire of badinage and drollery to raise my spirits.

It was of no use. The delicacies choked me. Where was the use of pampering me with such for one short evening, when the inevitable process of starvation was to begin soon—to-morrow, for aught I knew ? Moreover, Mr. Wagner's fattened turkeys sat ill upon my stomach ; his prime Mocha was gall and wormwood, when I remembered how he had chuckled over the thought of our speedy ejection from parsonage and parish, if he had the power. So I said, regretfully, that I was not hungry ; and when the nuts, raisins, and candies were brought on, I timidly begged leave to put them into my pocket "for the children at home." Carl was off like a shot at this, rushing downstairs with great bounds to get a basket, and with it a yet more bountiful supply of confectionery from the hostess. Pouring this last into my lap, he forced the covered basket into my hands, and bade me amuse myself by filling it. There was melancholy pleasure in the task, albeit something kept saying to me as I performed it, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die !" The tears were hot and thick under my eyelids in thinking of the happy, rosy faces that would greet the display of the treasures ; but I wiped them furtively, while my companions dropped into familiar talk, and left me to myself.

College life was their theme, I presently discovered, when I began to listen. Cromer was in the Junior class; was eighteen years old, and meant to enter the seminary in due season. My heart fluttered slightly; gave one faint "peep" of joy—as a half-dead chicken might, putting out a leg or a wing to assure itself that there was still life in its battered body—at hearing Carl's frank confession that the country lad, whose only teacher was his father, was quite as far advanced in Greek, Latin, the English classics, and higher mathematics, as was the best scholar in his (Carl's) recitation-room.

"And I dare say you are more thorough than any of us," he added, with the same wholesome candor. "As is the case with many who are fitted for college by private tutors, you have *learned*, instead of cramming. Why, you are ready to enter the Junior, if not the Senior. You intend to go to college some day, don't you? Although you are young enough to wait a year or so."

"I want to go!"

The suppressed but passionate pain of the intonation touched the other, I could see; but he could not comprehend it as I did. I, who was his confidante—who alone knew that for four years he had been striving to make and lay aside a sum of money that might warrant him in attempting to pay his way through college. "The fund," we called it, ambitiously; and when a whole dollar was added thereto, felt mightily encouraged. In November, after the sale of the tur-

keys, there were twenty dollars in the treasury—a tin box, hidden in a chink in the barn-floor. One day, early in December, Ronald surprised his mother in the act of cobbling a pair of old gaiters for herself—a pile of hopelessly worn children's shoes lying by her chair. He walked that afternoon six miles to the nearest market-town, and brought back five pairs of shoes, bought with his own money. Neither of us had opened the box from that day.

"I want to!" For one instant the boy's ardent soul leaped into his eyes; his voice, so much more manly and sonorous than that of his interlocutor, quavered and broke. Then he laughed huskily.

"Ours is a Calvinistic creed, you know. If my matriculation is a decreed fact, it will come about sooner or later. I try to be patient. It is not always an easy lesson, as you may suppose."

Carl's respectful silence lasted several minutes. He mused—his eyes on the floor—the long fingers of one hand playing nervously upon the other.

"It is somewhat remarkable—no, it is not, either, for it is really a common event—but one-third of our class are not in college at their own charges, or their parents'. Their expenses are defrayed by the Board of Education—at least, those of the students who are intending to study divinity are; or they are supported through their academic course by persons who are friends to learning, and take pleasure in helping promising young men. There's Otis Wagner, for instance, whose uncle pays his way."

"But if one hasn't a rich uncle, or, if he has, had rather starve—mind and body—than accept a benefaction from him?" returned Ronald, in an odd, stifled tone.

Throwing off the unnatural constraint, he faced his new friend with sudden courage.

"No ; I do not seek to hide from you, or from myself, the extreme improbability that my dreams of scholarship, and the profession I would select above all others as my part in life, will ever be fulfilled. How can I be sanguine, when I see a man of my father's intellectual gifts and culture the slave of poverty and the caprice of a set of illiterate rustics, in whose eyes learning is one of the things that 'don't pay'—who actually value his ministrations the less because they hire him to preach and pray for them? If anything could curb my zeal and resolution, it would be this living exemplification of the vanity of mental and spiritual travail over such souls as compose his *cure*—if they are *souls* !"

Oh, if he had not said that! A deadly throb attacked my heart anew. I shook with cold affright, wrought by shame and fear. Shame that Mr. Cromer should have this additional evidence to the truth of Mr. Wagner's statements and predictions; fear lest he should betray to the affectionate son his consciousness of the doom overhanging his house.

"Ronald," I interrupted, awkwardly, "don't you think the Mother will be uneasy if we do not go downstairs?"

"Allow me to escort you, Miss Hedden," entreated Carl, in gay gallantry, offering, not his hand, but his arm. "Leave your basket in your brother's charge. He will strap down the top and see that it is taken to the carriage when you are ready to go home."

In the lower hall we met Rosa and Bella, attended by a train of sycophants of their own sex, and near their age.

I write it down as my deliberate conviction, founded upon the experience and observation of many years, that there is no more disagreeable animal known to science than the pert miss who mistakes rude familiarity for wit, brutal disregard of the feelings of those more modest and sensitive than herself for maintenance of becoming self-importance. The Misses Wagner were staying at home this winter, enjoying a vacation from all studies excepting music; but they were forward in announcing to those who would hearken that they were going to a fashionable boarding-school early in the spring, and hated the "horrid country." Thanks to the Mother's watchful care of me, and the gentle dignity of demeanor that kept them within decent bounds in her presence, I had never suffered much at their hands. If their scornful looks and stiff bows in church sometimes surprised and abashed me, I was willing to forget the enigma by the next time they came to the parsonage for a music-lesson, and tarried after it was finished to chat with me, in the dearth of society they were forever deploring.

They took me, therefore, at a cruel disadvantage

now, by saluting my appearance with shrill titters and inhospitable gibes.

"Here is Miss Hedden, I declare," cried Bella, seizing my arm, "and escorted by a grown-up beau."

"We thought you had taken the veil—gone into a nunnery for good and all," said Rosa, "especially after we had seen your elegant new black robe."

"Only seventy-five years behind the fashion!" put in her sister. "Don't she look like her own great-grandmother? Without ever a scrap of trimming on it—up to the chin and down to the knuckles! Why didn't your mother button it over your ears at once?"

I had the presence of mind, blind and dumb as I was under this fresh outrage, to be thankful that Ronald had lingered upstairs to fasten the top of the hamper, understanding by intuition that his ireful defence of me would have provoked further tumult. Carl drew me onward, espousing neither side openly.

"Don't mind them!" he whispered, when we were free of the small mob. "There is your mother. Shall I take you to her?"

I was conscious of a pang (if I could feel one more) of disappointment that Sir Philip Sydney had not drawn sword at the onslaught on his inoffensive charge—pain I recollected many a year thereafter. Then—a crushed, palpitating little heap of nerves and heart-fibres—I was committed to the Mother's care, crept into her shadow, and left it not until I was safely seated in the carriage at her side, and bowling homeward over the no longer enchanted road.

The cold nipped my frostbitten heels tinglingly; the chill of penury, the blight of mortification, dire and irretrievable, ate more savagely into my soul. I neither moved nor spoke in our ride. I fancy that even the Mother believed me to be asleep, for she did not touch me until she drew me toward her and kissed the face whose wretchedness she could not see, as we stopped at the parsonage gate.

"Kinder tuckered out, ain't you?" said Mrs. West, holding the kitchen-candle so that the light fell upon me. "You look awful peaked! Better tumble into bed soon's you can."

Ronald escorted her home across the moon-lighted meadows. Papa went to his study for a couple of hours' work, it being but half-past ten, and the Mother, without comment or query, undressed me as she might have handled baby Harry, anointed my feet anew, and, wrapping me in a blanket-shawl, sat down with me in her arms in a rocking-chair.

"We will have a quiet little time to ourselves before you go up-stairs," she said.

To have her hold me thus, and sing softly while I lay lapped in love and waking dreams, was the chiefest luxury I knew. So, when she asked, "Now, what shall it be?" I understood that she meant for me to name a song.

"The new hymn," I faltered, turning my face toward her shoulder that she might not observe my tearful eyes. Every touch, every love-word that knit my heart-strings more closely about her, added weight to

my misery. By the time the song was finished, what between my agonizing anticipations and the habit of unbosoming all my woes and joys to her, I could keep silence no longer.

"Mamma," I began, tremblingly, "when people love their children they try to make them happy, don't they?"

"Yes, love; certainly."

"Then if God loves good people—like Job, you know—why doesn't He treat them better than He does anybody else?"

"He does, my little May, much better."

My countenance must have expressed my mournful unbelief, for she went on:

"He withholds no good thing from His beloved. Those are His words."

"Aren't fine houses, and plenty to eat, and nice clothes good things?" questioned I.

"Sometimes; at other seasons, and in other circumstances, they are hurtful. Let me tell you a story to show what I mean. A great painter was once employed to cover the inner walls and ceiling of a church with pictures—frescos, as they are called. One day he had worked as he had never worked before. The figures and faces seemed alive; leaves and flowers grew under his brush as by a miracle, dewy, fragrant, and beautiful. As he painted he would now and then step backward to see the effect of what he had done. Each time he went a little nearer the edge of the scaffold, built against the wall, forty—maybe fifty feet

high. At last he stood, without knowing it, with but half a step between him and death, delighting in the work of his hands, thinking of other and as lovely pictures he would make. At that instant a man who was painting on the same scaffold turned his head and saw his danger. Quick as thought, he dashed a brush wet with paint against the wall, daubing and blotting out the loveliest frescos there. The painter sprang forward in horror and surprise, and his life was saved. My sweet little daughter, the Father knows what is best. Sometimes He pours out what seems to us to be His wrath upon our pleasant pictures, but it is because He loves us too dearly to let us lose ourselves in a world that does not love Him."

I lay still for some moments, and she crooned lowly while she rocked me :

" Every pain and every sorrow
Bring His own to Him more near."

" But, Mamma," I resumed, " couldn't He keep riches and all that from hurting us if He chose ? "

" Yes. He shut the lion's mouth while Daniel was in the den, and suffered not the fire to kindle upon the garments of the Hebrew children. He sees that some of His saints can live in king's palaces without harm to themselves. Others He cannot trust. He puts each where it is safest for him to be—where he can best glorify the Master. His holy will be done ! "

She said it to herself, as it were, her voice falling into a cadence of ineffable and reverent tenderness.

I could not restrain the query that arose to my tongue:

"Suppose He were to let you, and Papa, and the rest of us—*starve*!"

The awful word stuck so fast in my throat that I had strength to utter no other when it was out.

"I am not afraid of that, dear." How brightly she smiled while I quaked from the effort of the half-confession! "'Their bread and their water shall be sure.' I am not yet an old woman, but I do not believe I shall see the righteous begging bread any more than David did. O girlie mine! don't vex yourself with fears of to-morrow! It is not wise, because we cannot make it clear or dark. It is not kind because we distrust Him in the hollow of whose hand we should dwell in peace and safety. And it is not honest, because to-morrow is God's property. Not a second of it belongs to us. I hear Ronald at the gate. Shall we get ourselves upstairs before he comes in?"

She asked no questions as to how I had passed the evening. It was not until I was a woman grown that I revealed to her the origin of the depression which succeeded my first party. She tucked me snugly in my bed, put away the "finery" I could not endure to look at, laid out my every-day clothes for the morrow, and bent to kiss me "good-night." In a transport of love and gratitude, I held her down to me. She did not resist the embrace; rested quietly in it for a minute, then spoke gently, as if addressing some one on the other side of me:

"Dear Lord! teach this, our child, to trust Thee entirely, without one fear, now and forever. Amen."

I understood, in a flash of thought, what Ronald had meant by "The Presence."

But one dark thought lingered with me. After I had heard her and Ronald seek their respective chambers, I got out of bed, groped my way to the table, lighted the candle, and consulted an old dictionary that lay on the window-sill.

"Foundling," I read: "a child exposed to chance; a child without parent or owner."

I shut the book with a sudden clasp, and hurried back to my pillow.

Was *that* myself? Had I no right to the home that covered me—the name I bore? Was I without father, mother, or descent, "exposed," like a shivering lamb cast in an open field, to the blasts or the fangs of Chance, formless monster?

As I caught my breath in a long, racking sob, two words were whispered to me, so distinctly I believed my bodily ears caught them:

"*Our* child!"

I belonged, then, to God and the Mother. Of what should I be afraid?



CHAPTER V.

BITTER MEAL.

TWO Christmases had come and gone since my first experience in party-going, and the wild beast Starvation was apparently no nearer the parsonage-door than when Otis Wagner had raised the cry of "Wolf" in my affrighted ears.

It was the first of February—a lowering afternoon that tasted and smelt of a snow-storm not far off. Papa and the Mother were spending the day at Mr. Vansant's, four miles off, he having sent his Jersey wagon for them in the forenoon. I was esteemed old and steady enough to be entrusted with the care of the house without the supervision of Mrs. West, especially as the Mother had taken Harry with her. We four—Felix, Albert, Mark, and I—were having a fine frolic, popping corn in the kitchen—in none of your patent poppers, understand, but in the open, shallow frying-pan, which I had previously greased thoroughly. It was Felix's turn to hold and shake it over the coals, when the first instalment of tiny, hard, glossy corns

had turned themselves inside out under my manipulation, and been transferred to a dish. While he carried on the pretty work, I told the children a story.

"It was when I was a little girl," I thus prefaced it, "not more than eight years old. Ronald and I had been reading the *Swiss Family Robinson*, and you recollect they found a sort of sweet acorn—"

"Don't half believe that book!" interposed Felix, already red in the face with his energetic action and fire. "Deal of buncombe in it!"

"But you see I was so small!" explained I, apologetically. "One day, I heard Mr. Sears talking to Papa about the failure of all the crops—wheat, corn, rye, potatoes—everything that year. 'Rely upon it, Dominie,' he said in his solemn way, 'our children will be crying for bread before spring. It behooves us to be provident and e-qui-nomical.'"

"A little more through the nose, and you'll take him off very well," said our family mimic, patronizingly.

"I thought Mr. Sears ought to know," I pursued, "as he was a farmer and an elder in the church, and I was desperately scared. I would not eat bread or potatoes after that, if I could help it, and when the Mother insisted upon my doing it, I used to take a very big piece of meat and the least imaginable crumb of bread, for fear the meal and flour should give out too soon. By and by, I recollected about the sweet acorns, and whenever I could get off to the woods alone, I hunted for them. I didn't find them, as you may suppose, but I noticed that the pigs ate the bitter ones

and got fat. So I took a basket with me in my walks, and happening upon an empty box in the far-off corner of the hay-loft—a box with a tight lid—I filled it, little by little, with acorns, without telling a soul about it.”

“Not even the Mother?” asked Albert, surprised.

“No. I used to fancy what a pleasant surprise it would be to her when all the flour and meal and potatoes were gone, to lead her up to the loft and show her my ‘hid treasures.’ I was sure they could be ground into a sort of meal, that wouldn’t taste very well, to be sure, but would keep us from starving. Every few days, I would creep up to the loft and bite into an acorn to see if they were getting sweeter as they dried. They were horribly bitter to the last, which was when Ronald found them in the spring, and wondered how they got there. By that time, there was no more talk of famine, and I was so ashamed of my foolish plan that I could not confess to dear old Ron why I had gathered the useless things. I was glad that he threw them into the pig-pen without asking any more questions.” *

“There’s nothing of the Paul Pry or blab about him!” interjected Felix. “He doesn’t put a fellow through a catechism forty times a day; just minds his own business, and lets other people alone.”

“And you didn’t have to eat the bitter meal after all,” commented Mark. “I wonder if we could have lived on it?”

* Fact.

"I was glad we were not obliged to try," I said, laughing. "I had rather live upon popped corn—the Arabs carry parched corn in their long journeys, you know."

"I read once," observed Albert, who remembered everything he had ever seen in a book, "of a traveller who lost his way in a desert and was almost starved, when he picked up a bag of what he supposed was parched corn. 'Judge of my disappointment,' he says, 'when I found that it contained pearls instead.'"

"Bouncing ones they must have been for him to make such a mistake in feeling them through the bag," said Felix, emptying his snowy burden into the platter. "Sprinkle a little salt on *my* pearls, Maysie, and I'll fill up the frying-pan for Al."

"Please, Felix, don't call me *that*," I entreated as I obeyed. "It is Ronald's name for me, and it doesn't seem kind or fair to him, somehow, for anybody else to use it while he is away."

"Anything for a quiet house," said the good-natured brother. "But if I wasn't rather soft-hearted myself about the interesting youth, I'd be furiously jealous sometimes. I believe you think he can't do anything wrong—he and Mr. Cromer."

"Mr. Cromer is our *benefactor*," I announced, magniloquently. "I would be very ungrateful, if I didn't like and praise him. Now, if you boys will be careful about the fire, I will set the table. The Mother will be home before long. It is getting dark."

While passing to and fro, from china-pantry to tea-

tray, laying the cloth, cutting the bread, and lighting the lamp, my thoughts followed the bent given them by my last speech.

As a family, our obligations to Carl Cromer were great, far exceeding the knowledge of the younger children on the subject. Within two months after his Christmas visit to the Wagner's, Ronald had had a letter from him, broaching an interesting but delicate topic. A wealthy man had, at his own entrance upon college-life, Carl stated, offered to defray his expenses there and in the seminary. Upon the receipt of his grateful refusal, this friend had deposited to Carl's credit in the bank a certain sum for the use of any young man whom he might in the future desire to befriend.

"This sum is at your disposal, my dear Hedden," wrote the collegian, "as a gift or as a loan, as you may prefer. If the latter, it must be passed on at your convenience and pleasure to some other person who desires to obtain an academic education. By the time you are ready to refund it, one of your brothers may be inclined to receive it. My friend devoted the amount to this purpose absolutely, and without condition, other than that which I have named, before I ever met you. You shall not even know his name. I will not have you burdened by an embarrassing weight of gratitude. For, after all, the gift is to the cause of education at large—not to you or to me."

Several letters were exchanged of question and reply, of demur and urgent appeal, and in the ensuing

fall our Ronald saw the fulfilment of his cherished aspiration. He entered the college, of which his father was a graduate, and, as Carl had predicted, the Junior class. Thus much, and that the intimacy between the two was close and strong, all of our household, unless I except Harry, knew. Carl had visited us in the September vacation—a golden season in the memory of each of us; and at Christmas, we had had a box of books from him—one apiece, with our names written in them by his own hand.

The Mother, Papa, and I knew more yet of his thoughtful goodness. The first week in January, a letter had arrived for Rev. Felix Hedden, the like of which he had not read in ten years. It was a request that he would supply the vacant pulpit of a pleasant village church not many miles from the town in which the college was located, on the second, and, if practicable, third Sabbaths of that month. This epistle was signed by the "Committee upon Supplies," and one of these was "J. A. Cromer," Carl's uncle, as we afterward learned.

I had never before seen the Mother so moved from her usual cheerful equanimity, as when she made ready her husband for the momentous journey. She wrote with her own hand, to a friendly clergyman who had no stated charge, a resident of Wiltfield, the neighboring market-town, and engaged him to take Papa's place in the Wyanoake church on the Sabbaths designated, and busied herself in preparing the simple outfit necessary for the jaunt, with an unsettled bright-

ness in her eye that was pathetic to me even then. I know that she endeavored, with tenderest tact, to impress upon him the propriety of brushing his coat, wearing his collar and cravat straight, and of not confining his eyes and thoughts exclusively to his MS. while preaching. I am as sure that when she clung to his neck in parting her whisper was a prayer—a “god-speed”—that was agonized in earnestness.

It meant so much to her—the prospect of appreciation of her husband’s worth and talents; schools and society for her children; relief for all from the grinding burdens of poverty; time and place for other service for the Master than “sweeping a room as for His laws.”

Well, he went from us, and was absent ten days, including two Sabbaths, returning with a more alert step and air than he had borne away, and an encouraging report of his visit. He had been hospitably entertained by Mr. Cromer—Carl’s relative; had excellent congregations at all his services; been called upon by most of the prominent men in the church, several of whom had hinted their hopes that he would become their pastor, and the committee had paid him fifteen dollars per Sabbath. Could anything be more charming, or promise better for the result of the trip? In my opinion, we had nothing to do but thank God, and wait for the call that must be along shortly. It was hard work to withhold the secret from the boys, but the Mother counselled discretion while the event was uncertain.

"It would be a pity to raise their hopes only to cast them down again," she represented.

"As if there could be any doubt!" I smiled to myself, now, going on with my work, and thinking that my supper-table would look well even in Leighton, stylishly as the inhabitants of that place lived. I sang aloud in my happiness :

"Your harps, ye trembling saints
Down from the willows take,
Loud to the praise of Love divine,
Bid every string awake !"

"Thank you, my daughter," said the Mother's voice, and she drew back my head to kiss me, at the end of the verse :

"Blest is the man, O GOD !
Who stays himself on Thee,
Who waits for thy salvation, Lord,
Shall Thy salvation see !"

"That is a word in season, dear ! We will wait !"

"Mother," I cried, in alarm, for although she smiled, she was very pale. "Is anything the matter ? Where are Papa and Harry ?"

"Harry is here—in the hall. Papa went to the barn. Both are well and safe. We have so much left for which to thank our Father, that I ought not to feel as a disappointment what we have heard. There was a letter from Ronald at the post-office for me. The blessed boy ! No other woman ever had such children. He too is in good health, and affectionate and loyal as ever. But he writes promptly, lest the news should

reach us in some other way and give us more pain—that the Leighton church has made out a call to Rev. Dr. Barr, who will probably accept it.”

I stood aghast.

“Mother! When they had almost promised it to Papa. How wrong! how cruel!”

“Hush, love! They tested his qualifications to serve them and the Master, along with those of other candidates, and they had the right to choose freely between them. Not a word of this to the boys! I am thankful they are in happy ignorance of the whole matter. And in dear Papa’s sight, we will be brave and of good cheer, my little woman—my comforter! Mrs. Vansant sent these turnovers for your tea-table. How neatly you have set it!”

She passed on into the kitchen, whence proceeded a chorused welcome at sight of her. Harry scampered after her. I took the turnovers, flaky, spicy, and still warm, from the towel wrapped snugly about them, piled them in a plate, and put them on the table mechanically. The fall of my latest castle, founded, I had believed, upon a rock, had shaken the earth beneath me. The roar filled my ears; the dust blinded my eyes. Feeling a scalding drop plash upon my hand, I ran out of the front door and sought a favorite haunt of mine when I wished to read or think undisturbed. This was an angle formed by the pile of logs ready to be sawed and split at the back of the wood-house, with the shed itself. The wood, projecting slightly at the top of the heap met the low eaves, and

sheltered me in wet weather. Creeping into this hollow, and crouching upon my accustomed seat—a block at the farther end, drawing my dress cowlwise over my head, I buried my face in my apron, and made my moan to the bleak night over the loss of the goodly heritage which had seemed, less than an hour ago, within my reach. I had thought of little except Leighton since the arrival of the invitation to Papa; had mapped out the career of each one of our flock in that flourishing town. We belonged no more to Wyanoake. In behalf of the entire family I had mentally abjured serfdom to Mr. Wagner, the Consistory, and the inquisitorial cabal of gossips of the other gender. What marvel that the fetters grated, and pinched, and inflamed my soul in the re-clasping? For myself, I craved a view of the world beyond this narrow amphitheatre of mountains. I had grown fast, mentally and physically, since Otis Wagner had struck the scales from my eyes as to our real position in Wyanoake. I knew, and felt, with them, my parents' hardships and struggles in their uncongenial sphere. I had thanked their God from a full heart fervently, that the door of the prison-house was opening. And now things were worse with us than ever. We were confounded because we had hoped. I positively hated the people of Leighton, whom I had blessed continually during the last fortnight. Why had they exalted us unto heaven but to cast us down to despair?

The night grew darker and more raw. I could hear the wind roaring in the tops of the pines on the near-

est hills, and a sharp patter on the logs above me I recognized as hail. The snow-storm had begun. Its chill stole upon muscles and veins, and an occasional ice-pellet mingled with my salt tears. Papa was in the barn bedding the cow Albert had milked before sun-down. Through the one-paned window of the small building, a ray from his lantern struggled with the slant lines of sleet. It went out. The door opened and shut. Slow steps shuffled along the path leading to the house. Very heavy and weary they sounded. Without the kitchen-door they halted. The father seemed to listen to the happy clamor within; then turned aside, skirted the end of the woodshed, and approached me. I could not see him, and knew he could not make out the deeper darkness of my figure in the dense shadow of my covert, but I held my breath. Nearer and nearer drew the shambling feet. Within reach of my hand he stopped again; kneeled on the bare earth and prayed; the pitiless wind in his hair; the hissing hail beating fast upon him:

“O Lord God of my salvation! I have cried day and night before Thee! My soul is full of troubles; I am counted with them that go down to the pit. I am as a man that hath no strength. Thou hast put away mine acquaintances far from me. Thou hast made me an abomination unto them. I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. My heart is smitten and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. Lord! I am less than the least of them that call upon Thy name, who strive to declare Thy counsels. I acknowledge

my transgressions and my shortcomings are ever before me. But—" this in a sharp cry that shuddered upward to the inky heavens and cut to my heart—"these sheep—thy handmaiden and her babes—what have they done?"

Unsyllabled groans and sighs succeeded to the piteous supplication. My position was becoming too painful to be endured. I must have given audible token of my presence but for a loud rapping at the side gate of the yard, and a vociferous "Halloo! the house!"

The parsonage stood at the corner of the road leading from the main highway to Mr. Wagner's house. It was his voice to which Papa responded, making his way, as best he could, toward the invisible and untimely visitant.

"Is that you, Mr. Wagner?" he asked. "Will you not alight and come in out of the storm?"

"Not if I know it," was the coarse rejoinder. "See here, Dominie Hedden, I'm just from Wiltfield, and I've stopped by in the thick of this confounded sleet to ask if what I hear is true; if without ever saying one word to a living man or woman in Wyanoake, you've been off candidating. By Jiminy! I actually swore when the news was brought to me!"

"I supplied, at the request of the Consistory, the church in Leighton on the second and third Sabbaths of this month," was the dignified reply. "I presume no one can doubt my right to do so, provided my—the Wyanoake congregation did not suffer by my absence."

Lest the pastor might not believe the assertion of his

profanity under the first shock of intelligence, Mr. Wagner "actually swore" again, in hot, bold phrase that terrified me.

"Right? yes! any cur has the right because it's his nature to sneak and thief! A pretty return this for all the patience and charity we have showed you! To go whimpering among strangers with tales of your being tired of us, instead of the shoe being on t'other foot! Fury and tow! I tell you what, now you've set the ball in motion, you've got to tramp! That's sure as shot! And a good riddance. We won't keep you around a week longer! That's *my* say in the matter! Get up, you brute!"

The last remark, in a gentler tone than the rest, was addressed to his horse.

A broad, sudden stream of light from the kitchen-door flashed into the yard, at the roll and clatter that proclaimed his departure. By it I had a view of the solitary figure holding to the gate as if for support. The Mother saw it also; went out to meet him with swift footsteps, regardless of the tempest.

"My darling!" she cried. "Felix! husband! What has happened? Who has been here?"

I had no right to listen longer. I sped around to the front door, and crept unperceived up to my fireless chamber. I had scarcely time to plunge my face into cold water to efface the tear-marks, when Felix called loudly from the foot of the staircase:

"May, hurry down! I have immortalized myself! I have invented a new dish!"

He was capering about the supper-table, and his brothers, one and all, were enjoying his triumph, when I joined them. A bowl filled with a white mixture, oddly speckled with brownish dots, and steaming hot, stood before his plate.

"Popped-corn porridge!" he vouchsafed to explain. "Boiled in milk. Pepper and salt to taste! A small lump of butter stirred in finally. *Or*, if you prefer, eat with sugar and cream. Want another taste, Harry, boy? So he shall! I say, Miss May, I mean to take out a patent. What do you think of your ground acorns now?"

I tasted his "invention," and tried to smile in praise thereof; the while my eyelids were smarting with the suppressed tears, and my heart bursting to cry out through my lips:

"O my boy! my poor children! the time for eating the bitter meal has come at last!"





CHAPTER VI.

OUT OF THE STORM.

I WAS dreaming that the misery of the evening was a nightmare, that I was seated with a throng of others, hanging upon each sentence of Papa's installation sermon in the Leighton church. Ronald sat beside me, and Carl was in the pulpit behind the preacher, his dark eyes smiling happiness into my silly little heart.

Silly in the excess of delight—for I was saying to myself, "This is heaven upon earth! heaven upon earth!" when a touch awoke me.

The Mother stood at my bedside, a candle in her hand. The rest of the room was dark and freezing cold. Through the iridescent haze of sleep the halo about the slender tip of flame seemed to me to be made of snow-crystals. The wind flung the hail in great handfuls against the windows. I caught my breath with a cry of alarm.

"Hush! don't be afraid!" said the Mother, kindly. "Harry is very sick. I want you to get up and help

me. It is after six o'clock. The storm makes the morning so dark."

Another sound reached me while she spoke: a strangled wheeze like the breathing of a choking, dumb thing. It was in the adjoining room, the door of which was open. The Mother set down her candle and hurried back. I heard her speak, oh, in what tenderness of pity! and the thought pierced my awakening brain that it was Harry who thus fought for his life. I had never dressed so quickly before. My shoes were untied, my hair loose, when I presented myself in the sick-chamber. A fire burned red and high on the hearth, a tub of hot water was drawn to one side of it; Papa walked to and fro, a struggling bundle in his arms, swathed in a blanket. The Mother was dropping medicine into a spoon. And the scream of the wind rioting in the gorge, shaking the house until the timbers creaked, bellowing in the chimney and buffeting the blaze this way and that—shall I ever hear another tempest so fierce and unearthly?

"It is the croup, dear!" said the Mother, seeing me beside her. "It is always alarming to one who has never seen it before. When I have given him this medicine, I shall take him and let Papa go for the doctor."

"In this awful storm?" I whispered, fearfully.

Her cheek whitened but she spoke steadfastly:

"We have been up with him since eleven o'clock. God will guard the father who risks his own life in the hope of saving his child's."

Directed by her, I got together all the mufflers Papa could wear ; ran for his stout staff and tied a scarf over his cap and ears. Then he kissed us—all three, and went softly into the boys' sleeping-room for a moment. I lighted him down the stairs to the side kitchen-door, outside of which he had listened to his children's voices before he cried to the Judge of all the earth, "What have these done?" The blast tore the lock from my hold and extinguished my light, but I held the door half-shut by leaning all my weight against it and peered into the gray obscurity, the madly whirling chaos without, to trace as long as I could, the dim outlines of the shape that bent and reeled at the will of the wild wind in going down the road.

"If Ronald were only here!" uttered I, in a helpless passion of distress and longing, groping my way back to the fire, light, and the Mother.

It escaped me again an hour later, as I watched the convulsed limbs, listened to the shrill stertorous respiration that was more difficult with each moment. The Mother's lips quivered as if to shape an echo to my wish, but it was not said.

"Jesus is here!" she responded instead, laying her cheek to her boy's. "Dear Saviour! Harry belongs to Thee! Hold his hand and mine! Thou wilt *not* leave us nor forsake us!"

We got through the next hour, and the next, and still another. How, I cannot tell. The two-fold agony of anxiety for the sick child and the absent father drank up the strength of my soul, and what

was my childish suffering with that of a wife and mother?

"How did you live through it?" I asked her, long afterward.

"I laid the whole weight upon the Helper," was the reply. "I told Him I could not bear the least fraction of it alone."

Thus upborne, she forgot and neglected nothing. The older boys went about the various duties assigned them with scared faces, but without cry or hesitation. Felix made ready a hot breakfast for "Papa and the doctor;" Mark set the table, and Albert kept up the fires in all the living-rooms. Me, the Mother would have stay with her, rendering what services I could, bracing my shaken nerves by the spectacle of her fortitude and self-command.

Eleven o'clock! and no abatement of the angry tempest—black above, and wild white below. Noon! all the space 'twixt heaven and earth was a shifting snow-drift; snow that beat like Autumn rain and stung like myriads of prickles. The Mother would not suffer Felix to venture across the half-mile of meadow-land to Mrs. West's, although he begged her to do so.

"I will keep you all together while I can," she said, and about her we accordingly clustered, subdued into outward quiet by the war of the spirits of the air, and yet more by the sight of the growing feebleness, the fainter consciousness of that which she held to her bosom. Could it be our merry, romping Harry? our plaything, who had never been sick a whole day in his life? And, if the abatement in the frequency and

severity of the convulsions meant that he was better, why were the Mother's eyes filling with such sadly solemn light? why was her voice lowered as in a Presence to be revered, yet not feared? When at length I dared speak, the sound of my voice startled me as it might in the progress of a church service.

"We might try another warm bath, Mother?"

"No, my daughter. Please God he will not suffer much more. We will ask Him that this may be so."

We knelt as close to her as we could get without disturbing Harry.

"Our Father!" she said, gathering her youngest-born to her breast, "if it be Thy holy will, give this precious lamb an easy passage through the waters. He is so young and tender, dear Saviour! only our baby-boy—as Thou knowest! Thou who lovest him better than ever his mother can,—and she would lay down her life for him,—hold out Thy loving arms to receive him as he goes from ours."

Just here such a strange, sweet thing happened! Familiar with the accent of his mother's prayers, Harry folded his hands as he did in saying his own, every night at her knee, and his tremulous voice took up the petition:

"And bring dear Papa safe home—for Christ's sake! Amen."

It was his invariable petition whenever his father was absent at his bed-time, but it was to all of us as if we had never heard it before.

"Amen!" uttered the Mother, fervently, and there

was a great calm in the room while the storm was shrieking itself hoarse outside.

Not one of us arose or looked up until the Mother said:

“Our pet is going peacefully, but very swiftly. Kiss him ‘once more—each of you, gently! And now be still for a little while!”

A very little while! As one o’clock struck, the hush of the house was broken by stamping feet and manly voices. Papa and the doctor had come. A more loving Father, the Great Physician, had stepped in before them. The cure, which blind and infidel mortals call Death, was accomplished.

Still the storm went on and increased exceedingly. Lying in my bed that night, I felt myself rocking in the gale as a bird upon a bough; thought, yet without fear, how the wind from the wilderness smote the four corners of the house in which were Job’s sons and daughters, and that if we were summoned to take the upward journey (I could not say “the long journey” after seeing how quickly Harry had passed!) we would all go together.

“And stormy wind fulfilling His Word!” I murmured, in positive exultation. “Dying is but going home. I have learned that to-day.”

The wind had raved its strength to naught by morning, but the snow fell straight and steadily, swelling drifts into mountains, and covering all thin and bare spots from which it had been swept yesterday. Nobody from without came near us all that day, during which

the Mother sewed, in the intervals left by household tasks, upon Harry's shroud. We were as completely isolated from the world of neighborly sympathies and human ministrations as if the waste of snow had been an ocean. It was not until noon of the third day after the beginning of "the great snow-storm," when the fall had ceased, and the gray curtain stretched between us and the sky began to look harder and lighter, that a sled, drawn by four oxen, labored up the road to the parsonage gate.

"Here is Mr. Vandyke with a big box!" cried Mark, who was at the dining-room window.

Papa was lying on the lounge, sick with headache and a feverish cold, contracted during his toilsome search for the doctor. At this exclamation he started up, caught sight of the object which two men were lifting from the vehicle, and dropped upon the floor in a dead faint. It was but a momentary lapse of consciousness; but before he was quite himself again, the carpenter and his assistant had plunged through the snow-drifts to the side door, entered, and set down Harry's coffin on the kitchen dresser.

Mr. Vandyke's next step was to present himself in the dining-room, wiping his forehead with his red handkerchief.

"Good-day to you all!" he said, in the loud, conversational tone common in the district. "This here is a mortal bad piece of work, Dominie, I declare! Not but what the young one is better off, and you've a goodish sized family left, but this sort of thing does shock

them as isn't used to it. I've been in the coffin business for nigh upon twenty year, but it give me a kind of turn when Dr. Robb he called to my shop yesterday and handed me the little boy's measure. I'd have been over sooner, but the roads is that choked up, that as I was a-telling Peter as we come along, nothing but an 'occasion' would have tempted me to keep on. I ain't seen sich drifts in thirty year and more. Ain't over smart yourself, be you, Dominie? Ah, well! you mustn't take it too hard. There ain't none of us but has dispensations, and our loss is their gain. Shall I take the article upstairs, Mrs. Hedden? Now we're here, we'd better lay in the remains, I 'spose?"

Papa tried to rise, but the Mother held him down with one hand, while standing between him and the intruder.

"I will go up with you, Mr. Vandyke," she said, quickly. "Children, stay here with Papa."

With this she preceded the man to the spare room of the house; "the prophet's chamber" we used to call it, in reference to the clerical guests who had lodged there. The catalogue of the furnishment of Elisha's "little chamber upon the wall"—"a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick"—would have served nearly as well for this; and, as once in that, there now lay upon the bed a form stark yet beautiful, and the door was shut.

In the group left below stairs—the father, whose face was ashy as that of the dead, and the children huddled together at the foot of the lounge, too full of

grief and dread for tears—not a word was spoken while we hearkened to the heavy tread on the floor over our heads; the instant of silence in the which we felt that the men were gazing at the figure beside which they had deposited their load; then their lumbering descent of the staircase. At the bottom, Mr. Vandyke halted for some last words.

“Alongside of the other two, you said, Mrs. Hedden? I ain’t looked at the Dominie’s lot for eight or nine years, as I recollect, but I make no doubt there’s room for another child’s grave in a line with them what’s there. ’Twill look better for to have the three in a row. Ah, well! we must expect these trials in this world. And fretting don’t mend ’em. Sunday, then, had ought to be the day. There ain’t no sense in trying to get any ‘notice’ round before that. You see this is a Friday afternoon. ’Twill take nigh upon half a day to dig the grave, snow’s piled up so, and the ground’s froze as hard as a brick. And Sunday’s the best day for a winter funeral. The church has got to be warmed, anyhow.”

Papa had struggled to a sitting posture, and was panting with the effort to get upon his feet, when the Mother re-entered.

“This must not be, love,” she said, in loving firmness. “For the sake of us who remain, you must be prudent.” She pillowed the gray head on her arm, kissed the bloodless lips. “Do not think of what that poor ignorant man said, Felix. He knows no better. Let this new and great sorrow teach us new lessons of

charity for all—even those who despitefully use us, and Mr. Vandyke is not one of them. He means well, and would serve us to the utmost of his ability. After all," showing to us all her face, down which the tears were raining, rainbowed by the love-light in her eyes, and the tender smile of the mouth, "what does it matter to us in what way our boy's going home is spoken of? His white robe cannot be soiled, his rest in the Saviour's bosom cannot be disturbed by the mire and turmoil of earth. My bonnie baby! Papa's Harry! How he has enjoyed these two days that have been dark with storm with us! I think the angels are very glad to have him for a companion. I can imagine how he will prattle to his little sisters of home and us all; how much he will have to tell, and to learn of them. For heaven is home and this is home, and we—a loving family—are one and the same there and here. Oh! the riches that are ours in that new mansion, darling husband! What must they be when affliction, such as is rending our hearts, is said to be 'light,' in comparison?

"Now, my children, you can stay in the kitchen for a while. May will read to you how our Saviour raised the ruler's daughter and the widow's son, and you will be very quiet, for I want Papa to sleep."

We obeyed, and by and by we heard her singing softly, but clearly, as we had hundreds of times before—the panacea for the fits of nervous depression and sleeplessness that were frequent with her husband. My voice trembled and broke. We all wept together—the

boys bowing their heads upon my lap—as we recognized the hymn—one of the Mother's own—in which our baby's voice had joined when we last sang it :

“ ‘Come all ye heavy laden
And I your rest will be.’
Thus spake the loving Saviour—
Did He not think of *me*?
When weary, sad, and lonely,
Like some poor, frightened bird,
From wind and tempest hasting,
I take Him at His word.

“ ‘Those given me by my Father
I evermore will keep.’
Through darkness and through danger
He seeks His straying sheep.
And I, far off and sinning,
His blessed call have heard,
He came to save the guilty—
I take Him at His word.

“ ‘In heaven thy home is waiting.’
A home, dear Lord, with Thee?
Beside the silver river,
Beyond the silent sea,
Where grief nor pain can enter,
Nor hearts by sin are stirred;
His promise never faileth—
I take Him at His word !”

In the twilight of that day—twilight bright, unreal, solemn with the shimmer of the snow-radiance flowing in through the unshuttered window of the “prophet's chamber”—we three, the Mother, Felix, and I, while Papa slept, laid Harry lovingly in his coffin.



CHAPTER VII.

“O MOTHER DEAR, JERUSALEM!”



AND the morning and the evening were the third day.” The storm was slow in subsiding. All day Saturday the wind was hard at work packing snow and clouds into banks and walls. The air was thick with the driving particles, and murky with gray and slaty-purple shadows.

The Sabbath dawned dazzlingly clear and cold. The snow-crust was so hard that Mrs. West walked upon it, over drifts and hidden fences, across the meadows to us. She was a homely, illiterate woman, but I thought her beautiful and eloquent when her fast tears fell upon the marbled cherub face, so soon to be shut in from the light for all time.

“You know he was always a favorite of mine,” she said to me, who had accompanied her to the chamber. “I mind how sweet he sung in church last Sunday. The dear child! ’Twon’t be much trouble for him to learn the new song. He’s singing it to-day, we may be sure. I wish we was all there!”

The ejaculation brought to me the old Latin hymn Ronald had learned by heart, in the original, and the translation of which I had copied at length into my scrap-book. It had been singing itself in my heart and brain ever since the Mother had reminded us that our home in heaven was made more surely ours by the possession of those already there—the pioneers of our band :

"Thy houses are of ivory,
Thy windows crystal clear,
Thy streets are laid with beaten gold,
There angels do appear ;
Thy walls are made of precious stones,
Thy bulwarks diamonds square,
Thy gates are made of Orient pearl,
Would GOD that I were there ! "

From the few precious plants on the shelf of the South window of the dining-room the Mother had plucked some fragrant sprays of green, and a rose-bud—the only one on the bush—and put them within the plump, waxen fingers. The pretty lips were apart in a half smile, that had in it no touch of the living Harry's archness. The sweetness of his babyhood was there, blended with, and made majestic by, the dignity of Death. Beholding this mysterious and indescribable vision for the first time, it awed yet fascinated me.

"It seems cruel to bury anything so beautiful," I sobbed, to the good neighbor. "O Mrs. West, how can we bear it?"

"There's them as would tell you that was a sinful

feeling, child. *I* don't. I should grudge to hide a picture of anybody I had loved and lost, where I'd never see it again. It's nat'ral to grieve about it. I felt just so, through and through, when I buried each one of my five, and the scar is tender to this day. But what we should want them to live longer in this fighting and afflicting world for, I can't tell!"

The bell in the church-tower was ringing. It was small, rusty, and dissonant, but now the "toll, toll, toll," reaching us distinctly through the still, bright air, was to me solemn and impressive beyond comparison. It was an official and public acknowledgment of our bereavement, that moved me to more gentle thoughts of the people among whom we lived, than had been mine of late. Everybody must be sorry that our darling was dead. Other hearts ached because ours were torn and throbbing.

That was a master-stroke of the great painter of human nature's every-day life, which throws upon the real depth of poor little Copperfield's grief for his mother's death a gleam of complacency, "that a dignity attached to him among the rest of the boys, and that he was important in his affliction."

I can say with him: "If ever child was stricken with sincere grief, I was." Yet I was aware, and thrilled somewhat in the consciousness that we were, as a family, set apart for general respect and sympathy; that we would be the distinguished actors in the scenes of the day. Papa had locked himself in his study, directly after breakfast; the house was in perfect order;

the Mother had put on her black dress, and fastened her collar with a crape bow.

It is much the fashion with a certain class of critics—composed in about equal measure of cynics and pietists—to decry the custom, old as the days of Job, of ‘wearing mourning.’ I seek not to interfere with the convictions of any one as to the impropriety of what one party stigmatizes as absurd subservience to fashion; ostentatious mummery of woe, intended to do duty instead of genuine feeling; which is condemned by the other as rank rebellion against the Chastener. Still less do I call in question the sincerity of those who have “opinions” on this subject. I do not forget the terrible rebuke administered by one who entered a house of mourning as a comforter sent by the Man of sorrows, and finding the stricken mother clad in deep black, accosted her with: “I perceive, madam, that you have not yet forgiven Almighty God!”

The chronicler of this incident adds: “The timely admonition sank to the bottom of her heart.”

I should think it would—like any other stone!

I attempt no argument in defence of that which has commended itself to the feelings of mourners in all ages and in all lands, in the hour when everything of beauty and of pleasantness is so blotted out from earth that the very light is a pain, music mockery and torture, and eyes sore from weeping turn instinctively from beholding garish color. For myself, I never pass a woman in the street, robed in new and modest mourning, that I do not bow my head in involuntary

respect and compassion for one whom the Lord has touched; that I do not send up to the ear of Him who wept in Bethany, a petition that she may be upheld and comforted. In the belief that others feel and do the same, I cannot afford, in my day of calamity, to lose the thought and the prayer.

The Mother's mourning garb was a plain alpaca, two years old. Her winter hat was black straw, and when she had removed the knot of blue ribbon from the inside of the brim, the change in her attire was completed. Not until the hearse was at the gate—a rickety vehicle one shuddered in looking at, drawn by one raw-boned, spiritless horse, and driven by the carpenter's apprentice—was Papa summoned to join us. The Mother went up for him herself, and when they came downstairs together, I noticed that she had, overnight, put a crape band on his hat. I doubt if he ever saw it. He had grown perceptibly older during these three days. He walked like one in a dream, and pausing in the doorway while the coffin was borne through the yard, glanced back. We were close behind him, Felix and I, hand in hand, then Albert and Mark. The weary wistfulness of his eyes struck me with the saddest pity.

"Are these, then, indeed *all*?" they seemed to say.

The Mother murmured something in drawing him onward. Mr. Vansant had brought his Jersey wagon to convey us to the church. There was no other carriage, so Felix and Albert were obliged to go on foot.

We drove very slowly, and the brave lads kept up with us silently, with decorous gait and heads erect, walking on the untrodden crust of the roadside. I wondered, as I saw the Mother's eyes bent again and again upon them, and each time passing straight to the grim hearse before us, if she were not already thankful that one pair of little feet was spared the roughness of Life's highway. The church was half full of people, mostly men and lads. The short coffin was set upon trestles below the high pulpit, and we filed into the Pastor's pew. Sad as it all was, it was odd to me to see Papa seated with us. The loiterers about the door tramped heavily in, after thumping their cowhide boots lustily against the step, to rid them of the snow. The usual chorus of coughing and throat-clearing consequent upon the gathering of a winter congregation died into a deeper than Sabbath silence. Not until this had become oppressive, did it occur to me to look at the pulpit. The high, straight box was empty! The door was open, and I could see the whole length of the cushionless bench within. This was awkward, and, for a moment, startling, but I bethought myself, presently, that the newly broken roads would hinder the progress of Rev. Mr. Berg, to whom Papa had written, asking him to perform the funeral service. That he might not succeed in getting to the church at all did not enter my head. We sat still for ten minutes, before I saw Elder Sears touch Elder Noyes, and both stoop until their heads were hidden by the front of the pew. A whispered colloquy ensued, the harsh

sibilations vibrating to the remotest corners of the building. This over, Mr. Noyes got up on careful tiptoe, making more noise than ever tiptoe did before, and went over to Mr. Vandyke. Another earnest confabulation, and the two worthies—the elder and the undertaker—approached the Pastor. By this time every eye in the church was fastened upon them and upon him. He sat motionless, his head resting on his thin, brown hand. His eyes looked right onward; had still that weary, wistful depth, as if he waited and wondered for his youngest-born. This "intensely questioning for treasures fled!" In lessons how sharp and few, we learn what it means—how soon acquire the habit ourselves, and for how long!

Papa started when Mr. Vandyke touched his arm. The Mother sat by her husband, I next, and the dialogue that ensued was audible to us. Mr. Vandyke spoke first, his rugged features expressive of genuine concern and perplexity:

"Here's a balk, Dominie, what I hadn't looked for, and I'm bound to say as how I ain't to blame for it. I sent your note to Dominie Berg by Brother Noyes here, he being road-master and out with the teams yesterday a-breaking of the snow, and had to pass the Dominie's house. *He* wasn't to home, but Mrs. Berg she was tolerable sure that he would be before Sunday, and if he did come she'd send him over, sure! So Brother Noyes he thought the matter was clinched all right, and didn't bother no more about it. But it begins to look shaky, his not coming. I might have

sent for Dominie Rogers if I'd have mistrusted how things would turn out."

"*He* couldn't have come, nohow!" said Mr. Noyes. "The roads that way ain't been opened. 'Twould be more'n a critter's life is wuth to try 'em."

"Am I to understand, then, that there will be no clergyman here to bury my dead out of my sight?" asked Papa, his eyes clearing into stern inquiry in passing from one to the other.

He did not whisper, and the ring of his low tones carried the words to most of those present.

"I am real sorry." Mr. Vandyke was more and more embarrassed. "If I'd have dreamed of such a bad job as this, I'd have looked sharp to prevent it. Though it does seem's if it couldn't a-been helped."

The Wyanoakers were comfortable-minded predestinarians whenever it suited their convenience to saddle "Was-to-be" with their own misdeeds and shortcomings.

At this juncture Deacon Vliet presented his ferret face between those of the two apologists, fussy and consequential as usual.

"I flatter myself I have arranged the unfortinit affair to the satisfaction of all interested," he said in a wheezing whine, compounded of conceit and an affectation of sympathy. "By a merciful and lucky Providence, Mr. Wagner's nephew from the Theologickel Seminerry is spending Sunday with him; and seeing how we were sitooated, I made so free with the young gentleman as to ask would he kindly take the service

—the melancholy service of the morning. He consented very handsome, and I've no doubt he's quite competent to improve the sad occasion, Dominie. And a little practice in this line, now and then, is a good thing for a stoo-dent."

Involuntarily, I looked at Mr. Wagner's pew, and met the supercilious stare I remembered so well and bitterly—recognized the languid curiosity and lofty patronage of Otis Wagner's countenance, ere he withdrew his regards and lay back in his corner next the wall, apparently profoundly indifferent as to the reception of his handsome offer. In fact, he looked bored.

Papa saw him, too, being now fully awake to what was going on about him.

"I prefer that the service should be conducted by a licensed minister of the Gospel," he replied, in quiet dignity, regardless of the dismay of the trio of church officers.

The sentence reached Mr. Wagner, or he may have divined its purport by watching the faces of the speakers. I have always hoped, in my charitable moods, that he was drunk that day. If this were so, it would have palliated, in some measure, the outrage that responded to the slight cast upon his relative. He snorted like a furious ox, feigned to laugh derisively, and threw himself, with a plunge, against the back of the pew, which cracked under his weight.

"Let the obstinate fool do up the business for himself, then," he muttered to his nephew, and Mr. Wagner's mutter was an exaggerated stage "aside."

Papa bowed his head for a second; the slender brown fingers were interlocked and wrung cruelly. Then he arose and walked steadily past the coffin up the pulpit-stairs.

"Let us pray!" he pronounced, with deliberate emphasis. "Eternal, merciful God and Father—the eternal salvation of the living and the everlasting life of the dying! Seeing that Thou hast death and life in Thy hand alone, and takest such care of us continually that neither health, nor sickness, nor any good or evil can befall us—nay, not a hair can fall from our head without Thy will; and since Thou dost order all things for the good of Thy people, we beseech Thee, grant us the grace of Thy Holy Spirit, to teach us patiently to endure our chastenings. Lighten the cross, so that our weakness may be able to bear it."

Thus much of the prayer I found afterward in the noble liturgy of the church he loved with loyalty that was a passion. It is there entitled "*A Prayer for the Tempted.*" The rest was extempore, and not to be reported in its fervor and beauty. Not once did his voice break or quiver. If tempted, he was not dismayed.

Next he repeated, without opening the Bible, the closing verses of I. Corinthians, 15th chapter, beginning with the 49th, and lifted his hands in benediction upon the amazed, half-terrified audience.

The procession was formed in silence, and we wound between heaps of snow and weather-blackened tombstones to the "Dominie's lot" in the rear of the churchyard. Standing on the verge of the open grave, I did

not recoil at seeing that the flying snow, hurried hither and yon by Saturday's winds, had settled in a thick, fleecy covering on the bottom, and, catching upon each little projection of the sides, hung them with drapery whiter than ermine, more beautiful in pattern and lightness than the costliest lace. The noonday sun touched it, and turned crystals to jewels. Our boy would be laid to sleep amid beauty a king might covet. I thought of the shining white gates that had opened wide to his baby fingers. The old hymn began to sing itself again to me :

"Thy turrets and thy pinnacles
With carbuncles do shine,
With jasper, pearl, and chrysolite,
Surpassing pure and fine."

Papa's voice, solemn and firm, recalled me to the present scene and present pain.

His head was uncovered ; he looked steadfastly upon the tiny casket imbedded in the snow. His outstretched hand held, as was the custom of the region, earth taken from the grave.

"In the sure hope of a joyful resurrection and a blissful immortality, I commit thy body, my son, to the tomb. I asked life for thee, and God gave it—even length of days forever and ever. I was dumb ; I opened not my lips because HE did it. Dust to dust ! Ashes to ashes ! Earth to earth !

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ! Amen !" *

* A true incident.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE STIRRED NEST.



VENT crowded upon event so rapidly during the rest of that winter, that I am dizzy in recalling them.

First, throughout and above all the rest, was the sense of missing Harry. The bewildering desolation of seeing his empty chair, his crib, his clothing, his toys, and feeling that they were ownerless; of looking vainly for him in the rooms which rang, it seemed but yesterday, with his laughter; of fancying that he was not far away, and must be with us again presently; then—scattering and shattering the fond illusions—the conviction, flashing and wounding like lightning, that he had *gone!*

In the simple words—wonderful in their pathos—of one to whom sorrow was a familiar draught, “Wherever we sought for him now in this world, he could not be found, any more than a flower or a leaf that had withered twenty years ago.”

In the simpler, sadder words indicated by the Spirit

that knoweth our infirmities in their every phase and season, "The places that once knew him, knew him no more."

He had gone, then! Not only out of our sight, but out of our lives. The lives with which, for four years, the golden thread of his had been interwoven, daily and hourly, so firmly that when it was torn out at one sudden wrench, the whole pattern was left distorted and meaningless, a hideous caricature of the once seemly web. To us children, the experience was new, and therefore startling. Yet I have learned since that, let bereavement come when it may, and never so often, it is as strange and terrible as if the sufferer had never before felt the stroke for himself, or seen others crouching under it.

Cruel as was the smart, it had a present advantage in that, by its very intensity, it lessened the effect of other trials that followed hard after it.

Mrs. Wagner called at the Parsonage on Monday, the day succeeding Harry's funeral. We had seen her husband drive by on the Wiltfield road with his nephew, directly after breakfast, and the Mother surmised correctly that, but for his absence from home, the brow-beaten little woman would not have found it convenient to pay us the visit. She came unannounced into the dining-room through the kitchen, where Mrs. West was washing (an act of neighborly kindness for which the Lord surely remembered His true disciple), and exclaimed at sight of Mrs. Hedden, who was far from well, seated at her work-stand, mending Mark's jacket,

while I recited a grammar lesson. The methodical ways of the household had been resumed that forenoon, without a break, except the one silent gap that would never be closed this side of our heavenly reunion.

"I declare!"—this was the first intimation we had of the lady's arrival—"anybody would think that nothing had happened here. I must say, Mrs. Hedden, that I envy your strength of mind and your having no nerves to speak of. I am just fairly used up with all the worry, and fuss, and hubbub that's going on about this difference between Mr. Wagner and the Dominie!—to say nothing of dear little Harry!"

She sank into a rocking-chair, and burst into tears. She was kind-hearted and meant to do well at all times, but was weak and timid; holding as a cardinal rule of faith and practice the duty of being guided in opinion by her husband. If her feelings counselled variance from his dogmas, they were in fault and must be schooled into conformity. Downright angry she could not be—that is, with the genuine, whole-souled wrath known to deeper and stronger natures. Fret she could and did, and it soon became evident that her errand to us now was to fret it out to her heart's content—to "have a good cry," and, so far as she could, "have done with" the trouble.

"I never thought to see this day!" she plained on; "never, never! To think of the years I've neighbored with you, Mrs. Hedden, and never had a word between us! And though I say it that shouldn't, I've tried to be a friend to you and yours."

"You have succeeded, my dear Mrs. Wagner," said the Mother, sincerely. "I shall never forget or be ungrateful for your many friendly acts and words."

"There, there! there's no use talking about it," interrupted the other, behind her handkerchief. "If an angel was to speak from heaven, it wouldn't undo what's done, nor change Mr. Wagner's mind. He was so aggravated by the way Mr. Hedden answered him back, the other night, when he stopped at the gate on his way from town to ask about this candidating story, and it made it so much worse, Otis being in the buggy with him and hearing it all—though, as I tell him, it's likely the Dominie didn't see him, it being so dark—that there's no saying what he'll do, unless Mr. Hedden will make an explanation. You can't think how insulting his language was. It won't do for anybody to be short or sharp with Mr. Wagner, and the Dominie ought to have remembered that and been more careful. And then, *that* Otis, who is the most sarcastic creature alive, would go on making fun of the matter, saying how comical it was that the Dominie was tired of us, and wondering how we'd ever supply his place, and taking off what happened at the gate that night in his cool, witty way, until his uncle fairly foamed at the mouth. Such a miserable time as I've had with the two of them, you can't imagine!"

"I am very sorry that we have been, even indirectly, the cause of unhappiness to you." The Mother looked deeply pained, but self-possessed. "But I have had an exact account of the interview you mention. Mr.

Hedden did *not* know that Mr. Wagner's nephew was with him. If he had, he could not have acted or spoken differently. I could not respect him, nor could you, if he had not asserted his right to exercise his own judgment in the conduct of his own affairs. For your sake, especially, we regret that Mr. Wagner is displeased. I cannot but hope that he will see the matter in a less offensive light when he has time to review it calmly."

"He won't, he won't!" sobbed Mrs. Wagner, in nowise soothed by this temperate statement. "Not one of those mountains over yonder is more set in its way than he is when his blood is up—or down either. He vows that the Dominie shall leave Wyanoake, since he has taken the first step himself. You must confess, Mrs. Hedden, blind as you generally are to your husband's failings, that *that* wasn't honorable or kind in him. It was real underhanded and unfair, when you consider how much we've done and borne since he's been with us. For there's no denying that the Dominie isn't an acceptable preacher, and nothing of a pastor, and the church is dying as fast as it can. I've always taken up for him when other people said so, but now my mouth is shut. If it hadn't been for what happened yesterday, the trouble might have been smoothed over. I was in hopes, till then, that you could talk Mr. Wagner round, he thinks so much of you. But how a Christian man, let alone a minister of the Gospel, could show such a spirit as the Dominie did toward Otis, just because he was Mr. Wagner's nephew, and they two had had some words together—how he could

fly out at the young man in the sight of the whole congregation, is something nobody can excuse. It made my blood run cold when he went into the pulpit. I should have thought affliction would have made him forgiving."

A bright, sudden flash swept over the Mother's face. Her eyes glowed, but her voice was held carefully, patiently, at its accustomed gentle pitch.

"I, who know Mr. Hedden better than any one else living does, or can ever do, assure you, Mrs. Wagner, that he is incapable of indulging in an uncharitable or revengeful spirit. He would have accepted Mr. Otis Wagner's services yesterday, gratefully, had it been in accordance with his ideas of right and fitness that any one who was not a clergyman should perform a clergyman's office. He may have erred in judgment, you will say, but you will find that a majority of ministers in our church hold like views on this point. As to his want of popularity among the people he has tried to serve faithfully, you are probably better informed than I. He is the Master's steward. To Him he must look for his reward."

"If he would only apologize to Mr. Wagner for what he said that night!" whimpered the visitor. "His independent tone nettled my husband, who isn't used to such talk."

"How can he apologize when he has done nothing that his conscience condemns?" asked the Mother, gravely. "The thought of incurring the ill-will of any one is unpleasant to us, but Mr. Wagner must not ex-

pect confession or apology from my husband. Neither is due him."

The poor rich lady relapsed into salt dampness. She mopped her cheeks with her handkerchief as she might a kitchen-table with a towel, actually wringing it out, and holding it to the fire to dry when she could again articulate.

"You've been so good to me in times past!" she said, "I shall always remember how you sat up with me four nights every week, and nursed me as if I was your sister the winter I had inflammation on the lungs, and my Annie died in your arms. 'Tisn't easy to forget such things, Mrs. Hedden! at least 't isn't for me."

The Mother went over to her visitor, sat down beside her, and took her hand affectionately.

"Nor for me, my dear old friend. Nothing that can happen must estrange us. There are too many sacred memories binding our hearts together. I loved your Annie; you loved my boy. For the sake of our children who are now with the angels, we must continue to love and pray for one another. Our earthly future is in God's hands. I try to leave it there in faith and hope."

Mrs. Wagner moaned, rocking herself back and forth.

"*He* saw nearly all the Consistory yesterday. They took just the same view of Mr. Hedden's conduct in the church as he did. I wasn't to let on about it, but you ought to know that it is all cut and dried. The Dominie is to be requested by letter to resign. If he refuses, Mr. Wagner will give up his pews and withdraw

his subscription to the salary. I need not tell you that the church can't pay expenses without his help. It is cruel! I can't help saying it, if I die for it."

"I understand it all." It did not strike me then as unnatural that the Mother should act as comforter in this case, but the situation would have been enigmatical to an observer who was not used to see her help and console everybody within the range of her influence. "I understand it perfectly," she repeated quietly, in reassurance of her nervous companion. "I thank you for the warning, and for coming to me this morning. I knew you would not keep away longer than you believed was best for us both. You say Mr. Wagner will not be back until night. Then you will be alone at home all day. Why not stay with us?"

Mrs. Wagner threw her arms around her neck.

"I can't—I daren't! I wish I could, instead of fretting my heart out in that big, lonely house. I'm terribly lonesome now the girls are off at school. I'd rather eat a dinner of herbs with you than sit down to one of my company entertainments. O Mrs. Hedden, the heart knoweth its own bitterness. You've no idea how different your husband is from other people's."

"I know no woman ever had a better or a nobler," responded the Mother, her eye rekindling, but with softer light.

"You see, you don't mind telling him what you think, and want, and do," pursued the other. "If Mr. Wagner was to guess that I'd been here to-day, he'd be just *dreadful*. I hadn't ought to say it, but the truth will

out when the heart is full. 'Tain't in human nature to play the hypocrite forever."

We accompanied her to the door when she went away; stood there on the sunny side of the house while she got into her sleigh and was driven down the road by her smart colored coachman. The last we saw of her, her handkerchief depended limply from her eyes, and promised to need rewringing before she got home.

"Poor lady!" sighed the mother, in genuine compassion.

"Because her husband isn't kind to her, Mother?" questioned I. "Because he is so unlike Papa?"

"Yes, dear," simply.

I clung to her hand as she went into the hall.

"Will they really and truly turn Papa out of the church, do you suppose?"

"They cannot do *that*. The church is God's, and he is God's minister. But that we will leave Wyanoake is, I think, pretty certain. Papa and I talked it all over last night. I will tell him what we have heard this morning, when he is through with the boys' lessons. I do not believe that he will await the action of the Consistory. We must seek another home, May."

She paused in the door, and glanced longingly, fondly toward the church-yard—a farewell, in anticipation, to the beloved dust we were to leave behind us.

A week earlier, while Leighton was still a possibility, her announcement would have brought ecstasy to my soul. Now it was the sentence of exile.

"Where can we go?" I asked, drearily.

The cottage-parsonage seemed such a cosey abode ; the world so wide and cold.

"I do not know, my love. Neither did Abraham when he left his fatherland. Faith made him bold. It should encourage us."

"But God called him, Mother. Mr. Wagner is driving us out."

"He is the unconscious instrument in God's hand. We will bear this in mind when tempted to repine at our lot."

"Maybe so, maybe so!" said a pious negro to me once, when I told him of a gracious revival of religion in a church the pastor of which had attained unfortunate notoriety as a man of violent temper and unscrupulous measures. "The Lord can strike a straight blow *wid a mighty crooked stick!*"

I had not heard the expression when I crept after the Mother to our sitting-room, and resumed—I fear me with a rueful face and indifferent success—the effort to parse my ten lines in Thompson's Seasons.

But a similar reflection was in my mind.





CHAPTER IX.

WAITING ON THE LORD.

DOES God ever disappoint the trust of his children? those who depend upon Him simply and entirely?

I asked the question of the Mother once, and she answered—"Never! But they are often impatient and unreasonable, forgetting that His 'Now' is very broad, reaching beyond the limits of our 'THEN.'"

He made our crooked ways straight very speedily at the time of which I am writing. As I said, in the last chapter, the march of change and event was bewildering to one whose previous existence had been so devoid of notable incident.

To set them down in order:—Papa called the Consistory together on the Wednesday after Harry's funeral, and laid his resignation before them. It was accepted with scarcely a demur—shamefacedly perhaps, by the weaker brethren, yet unanimously as to vote. Every man there was awake to the necessity of keeping Mr. Wagner in the church. Dominies—even candi-

dates for country charges—were plenty as huckleberries on their rocky hillsides, but in what direction should they look for another rich parishioner? Deacon Vansant had the grace to make a motion “that the Dominie’s salary be continued, and he be invited to occupy the Parsonage, rent free, until it suits him to remove his family.” Elder Sears offered an amendment to this, limiting his stay to a month from date.

“In case we might be led by Providence to settle another under-shepherd by that time,” he explained.

This was carried. It was further arranged that “the late Pastor” (already!) should deliver his farewell sermon on the next Sabbath but one.

The action of this august body did not surprise us. We had anticipated every step in the family council. We ate our supper that night with a better relish than the disagreeable business was settled beyond recall.

On Thursday we began to make ready for the sale of our household goods which must precede removal. Whither we had no idea, nor at what hour the command, “Forward!” might be spoken. We walked with eyes shut and ears attent in those days. Even the children had caught the lofty tone of their parents’ trust in the All-Father. Not that Papa was idle. He wrote several letters, as did the Mother, to old acquaintances in various parts of the country, inquiring if there were vacancies in church or seminary, or even agencies, for which he could apply with a reasonable chance of success.

We *did* have a surprise on Saturday night, just after

dark, when as we sat about the fire talking, not unhappily, although our theme was the birdling who had lately flown from our arms into the sunshine of the Father's visible presence and smile—the door opened quietly, and Ronald walked in. The children screamed with frantic delight; Papa stepped hastily forward. I caught the sound of one deep sob from the Mother, but she did not speak or arise. Only when Ronald knelt at her feet, his arms about her neck, and hid his face on her breast, weeping without thought of his manly age and stature, her hand stole to his head, and she breathed something in his ear of which we could only hear the thankful intonations.

He had four days' leave of absence, and had walked all the way from Wiltfield through the rain. On Monday he was closeted with his parents most of the day, and on Tuesday packed his father's chief worldly wealth, his books and MSS., besides making out a complete inventory of the articles to be offered for sale—our brave, helpful, hopeful Eldest! The Mother told me of his suggestions and the plans based upon them, while I assisted her with Wednesday's baking. She made a companion of me at a very early age—more, I imagine, because I had no other of my own sex, than to please herself. I never asked questions as to her intended movements unless she introduced the subject, and early learned to regard her communications as sacred. I may be mistaken, but it is a notion of mine that the practice would work well in other households, where the interests of mother and daughter are regarded as separate, if not antagonistic.

Ronald, then, had brought a scheme home with him. Ever since he entered college, he had boarded, as did Mr. Cromer, with Mrs. Fortescue, the widow of a deceased Professor. The lady's daughter had lately married a wealthy merchant from the West, and the mother would in future reside with her. She was willing to rent her house, furnished, to a good tenant, and Ronald had obtained the refusal of it, until he could consult with his parents respecting a project he and Carl had talked over often within the past fortnight. The Mother should take Mrs. Fortescue's place. He knew her to be an excellent housekeeper who had learned economy in a hard school. He had revealed his wishes to Mrs. Fortescue, and procured a written estimate of her expenses and profits. Carl's uncle and guardian consented that his nephew should become security for a half year's rent.

"I hope, however, if my life and health are spared, that no one will suffer loss by me," said the Mother, brightly. "I have examined Ronald's papers carefully, and think the plan feasible. It was all arranged before Papa's resignation was written or openly spoken of. Remember this, May, when you are tempted to doubt the love and care of our best Friend! Was not that answering before we called? Ronald and Carl think, moreover, that Papa can obtain pupils in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, among such college and seminary students as need or desire private instruction in these branches. We cried unto the Lord in the day of our trouble, and He has heard us. My darling! are you crying?"

I was—with joy. It had all come right at last! Wholesome daily bread was served to us in the stead of bitter meal. What mattered toil and economy so long as we were to have a home, and freedom to act and be *ourselves*?

For a week, I was what the Scotch call “fey,” and would have worked myself ill, but for the Mother’s wholesome restraints upon my energy. I took to dreaming again with the avidity of an inebriate returning to his cups after temporary and compulsory absence. Struck in the face by the mailed hand of hideous Reality, I had tottered and fainted. Awaking, I found the scene shifted. Leighton, which I had studied and loved, in every street and nook, was swept away, like a village of cards, and I beheld Old Harbor—name already fragrant in my thoughts as the cradle of classical and theological learning. The college—Papa’s Alma Mater—was there, and the never large, but always honorable school of the prophets, and Ronald and Carl! I lived, waking and sleeping, upon the Delectable Mountains. It did not startle me, although I felt that it was not quite right when I detected in my whirling thoughts the regret that Harry had not lived to become a resident of Old Harbor.

Papa preached his farewell sermon to a crowded house. Many had come expecting that the circumstances attending his resignation would be referred to, if not dwelt upon at length in his discourse.

“I did think he’d have given you a hard knock or two, seeing it’s his last chance at you, and some folks

do say you hain't treated him quite on the square!" said a stout farmer, a member of a neighboring church, to Deacon Vansant, at the conclusion of the services, not knowing that I was close behind him. "If I'd been into his place—"

I lost the rest.

I had listened to the sermon from the text to the benediction with breathless interest. It signified little to me who was used to his rapid, slovenly articulation, that the sense of many beautiful passages was marred by elisions and slurs; the pathos which moved me to tears was wasted upon the majority of his hearers because unaccompanied by appropriate intonation and gesture. It was not until the last written page had been hurried over and the Bible closed with the usual nervous snap, that the ill-used Pastor's eyes met those of the audience. The sallow face was suffused with a sunrise glow, the curves of the lips were firm and manly. Stretching out his arms toward heaven, with a motion that embraced the throng below, he poured forth an impassioned farewell, replete with such sincerity of affection for the people whose nominal spiritual guide he had been for more than a dozen years, such solemnity of appeal to the Judge of all as to the purity of his zeal, the earnestness of his prayers in their behalf, as bowed the most stubborn heart there.

It was inexplicable to me—the emotion that found vent through eyes which had long looked coldly and scornfully upon him and upon us; that elders Sears and Cormet should bury their faces in their pocket-

handkerchiefs and Deacon White sob aloud when they could have kept their Dominie with them for the rest of his life if they had been so disposed.

Felix and I discussed the problem in our walk home, and solved it to our satisfaction.

"Crocodile tears, you may depend!" he said, contemptuously. "They could shed a bucketful apiece, upon order. It's the thing to blubber over farewell sermons. There's a precious deal of humbug even in religion. Such religion as Old Sears', I mean. He must have a tank of salt water in the back of his head. It dripped between his fingers and made a puddle on the leaves of his hymn-book. And the cascade from Deacon White's eyes washed his spectacles off!"

We were not more charitable to other and more substantial tokens of regretful regard for the ill-used Pastor from those who had cast him upon the world. Now that we were really going, the neighbors vied with one another in offers of assistance in the work of breaking up our modest establishment. The Sewing Society was called together at Mrs. Vansant's to labor diligently upon two marvellous album quilts, with gifts of eatables, knit stockings, home-made linen, worked book-marks and pin cushions, with, now and then, a gold piece or bank-note, were showered upon us. We juniors, in our honest disdain for the donors, would have returned everything, incontinently. The wiser and more Christian elders accepted all, useful and ornamental testimonials together,—with a kind phrase and assurance of good-will the thumb-screw could not have extorted from

us,—the sincerity of which we yet could not doubt. In the haste and harshness of youthful judgment we did not appreciate the fact that our parents showed forth more brightly the graces of forgiveness and forbearance in receiving favors from those who had wronged them, than if they had sustained, without murmur, open insult from the same quarter.

The parishioners, in the excitement of their relief at getting rid of an unpopular minister, without odium to themselves or the unpleasant accompaniment of a "scene" in church, or classis; moved probably to something remotely akin to remorse by his magnanimous behavior and a real liking for his wife, went much further than Mr. Wagner approved, in speeding the departing incumbent. They got up a purse! A Committee on Consistory spent a whole week in canvassing the congregation, and screwed out of stocking-feet, strong-boxes, and jealously locked drawers, dribbets of respect for "Rev. Felix Hedden, our Late Esteemed Pastor," amounting, in the aggregate, to two hundred dollars. Poor Mrs. Wagner—so whispered the Committee in the Mother's ear—gave one-tenth of the sum from her butter and egg money.

"This is between you and I, Mrs. Hedden," subjoined the cautious speaker. "Mr. Wagner, he ain't nowise in favor of this movement, but dear me! a man can't expect to dictate the consciences of a whole church!"

Over this affluence of generosity, the Wyanoakers went crazy with ecstatic self-complacency. If the dis-

missed Dominie's family were not enabled to live in ease and plenty for the remainder of their natural existences, the skirts of the congregation were clear of blame. The only drawback upon their satisfaction in having thus triumphantly atoned for all possible past scores of neglect and slights and failure to provide for the Lord's servant things honest in the sight of all men, was the fear lest the possession of so large a sum might precipitate us into riotous living and unseemly extravagance. When they had, in addition to the favors I have enumerated, attended the sale, almost to a man, and bought our live stock and chattels at half their value, they "wished us well" with unction begotten of approving consciences, and dispersed to their several homes, there to sit them down beside their kitchen-fires and smoke the pipe of content upon the engrossing theme of contemplation and discussion—The Coming Pastor: who shall he be?

I make honorable exception, in describing the conduct of "the people," in favor of Mrs. West. The Dominie had buried her husband and five children during his pastorate. The Mother had been her best friend for ten years. The widow's attachment to us was not to be shaken by adverse winds of public opinion. She sturdily identified our interests with hers, spending most of her time at the Parsonage, working with and for us, not scrupling or staying to flout openly at the gifts of those for whom her mildest epithets were "traitors" and "ongrateful cre'turs." I cannot smile save in tenderest gratitude, upon any remembrance of her.

Dutch-built though she was, and, on working-days, addicted to the wearing of a black quilted petticoat and gayly-flowered calico short gown, girdled loosely about her fat waist ; although she was apt, when animated by her subject, to talk loudly and laugh until the dishes on the dresser shook their jingling edges in sympathy ; although her face was reddened and roughened by the heat of the cooking-stove and the soapy steam of the wash-tub, and her else-kindly tongue was merciless in butchery of her native language, as taught by books and spoken in polite society.

For she was a King's Daughter, and one in whom He delighted ; who honored Him in her generation, and for whom abundant honor was reserved in the Everlasting City. The coarse shell hid the pearl, but it was kept in safety and fairness as well.





CHAPTER X.

THE FLITTING.



WHEN the cottage under whose roof so many of us had been born was at length dismantled and cheerless,—the very cooking-stove having been borne away in Mr. Vandyke's wagon, with dear little Clover, our yearling calf, lying beside it, her feet tied together, her meek mother having been driven off by her purchaser in the opposite direction,—our good Mrs. West would have all of us go home with her for the last night we were to spend in Wyanoake. We had not lacked for invitations. But for our promise to our best neighbor, we must have been puzzled how to choose between the offers of shelter and hospitality that beset us on all sides.

Our heaviest baggage had been sent on before us in Ronald's care to Old Harbor. Of property which we could call our own there remained in the house but a couple of carpet-bags, which Felix and Albert could easily carry with them to Mrs. West's. The Mother

sent them forward thus loaded, with a smile and playful word :

“Up with your knapsacks, my men, and march !”

They leaped the roadside fence with a “hurrah,” and Felix’s whistle sounded back to us, jocund and musical, as they went gayly through the meadow-lands.

“They don’t realize it, you see,” sighed Mrs. West, raising a corner of her apron to her eyes.

“I am thankful they see only the bright side of the change. Novelty is always pleasant to the young,” returned the Mother. “Felix, love, will you walk on with Mrs. West? May and I will follow soon. There are still a few things to be looked after. I do not like to have you stay out late with your cough.”

He was wandering from room to room, head down and hands crossed behind him, his slow footfall upon the bare floors awakening dreary echoes, that reminded me of the sound of the frozen clods upon Harry’s coffin. The Mother looked significantly at Mrs. West, who put down her apron, and began to bustle and buzz like her kindly, cheery self :

“If you wouldn’t mind, Dominie, we had better be jogging along, you, and Markie, and me. It will be getting on for sundown by the time we reach home, and the children ought to have a rousing good supper after their day’s work, with nothing but a cold bite at noon. And I can’t step out as lively as I used to could when I was sixteen and weighed a hundred pounds less nor I do now.”

On the front steps Papa lingered as he had done the

day Harry was buried, gazed mutely into the fond eyes bent upon his, as his wife feigned to busy herself in buttoning his coat over his chest.

"Yes, darling, I know," was all she said, very softly, pressing his hand for a second to her heart.

She returned to the empty rooms with a step that did not lag or change from its accustomed stately measure.

"May, daughter, help me fasten the windows and doors on this floor. They are all right everywhere else."

"You thought it would pain Papa to see the house locked up for the last time—didn't you?" queried I, when we stood together in the kitchen, bonneted and shawled for our walk.

I spoke low. The faintest tone of the human voice was caught by the vacant corners, and repeated up the staircase to the chambers, where it went wandering around like a sorrowful murmur from the Past; as if the memories of the days and years, happy and sad, we had spent under that roof-tree were talking together, and deprecating our going. The empty hearth and fireplace gaped in stupid, mournful wonder at themselves and the desolate room. How much I had learned and suffered since the last merry afternoon we had had there! when I had told the story of the bitter acorns and Felix invented his popped-corn porridge!

"I knew it would, dear. He is acutely sensitive in such matters. We must spare him every pang that can be warded off by human love," she answered. "He has had enough to bear that we could not avert."

"You never think of yourself, Mother!" said I, abruptly, almost impatiently.

I loved Papa dearly, but in my worshipping fondness for her, I was tempted, as I grew in years, to be jealous for her happiness and comfort, so lightly considered in her own calculations of life and duty.

"You are mistaken. He is my other and dearer self. When my May is a woman grown, she will understand this better than she does now. It is love that makes labor light, and what would otherwise be self-denial, pleasure. Can it be that I had forgotten to put the nail above the back window of the kitchen?"

She laughed a little in fitting it to its place.

"I will make a confession about this same nail which you need not let go further. Twelve years ago, on the 2d of last November, we took possession of this house. I was half sick and very tired, and sad of heart at the close of that day. The weather was raw; the fires would not burn; the babies were uncomfortable and fretful, and I, who had lived in the city, felt a sense of strangeness and discouragement I had never known before—which has never overcome me since. Weary as I was, it was past eleven o'clock before I was ready for bed. There was no bread in the house, and having no servant, I had to mix a batch of dough, that we might have a loaf for breakfast. I had my bedroom candle in my hand, when I noticed that this window had no fastening. I was timid, being, as I have said, town-bred, and at once set about securing it. A carpenter who had worked here that day, had left a gimlet on

the mantel. With it I bored this hole above the sash, and as I thrust a nail deeply into it, I said aloud and unconsciously, 'A nail fastened in a sure place.' That was the text of the sermon that I preached to myself until I fell asleep peacefully, resting upon the sure mercies of Him whose goodness had followed me to this new abiding-place.

"Good-by, old home! Kiss me once more before we leave it, girly, dear! if only because you were given to me here. Now, come!"

"We are 'going out to meet the shadowy Future,' are we not, Mother?" I said, huskily, by reason of the sudden choking in my throat, as the click of the bolt and the rattle of the withdrawn key were taken up and reiterated by the echoes above and below in groans audible to us on the step outside the door.

"Not 'shadowy,' in one sense!" she responded. "'It shall be well with thee!' is a steady light that dispels mists and gloom."

At the gate, she turned down the road, instead of following the route the others had taken.

"I thought you would like to go to the church-yard with me," she observed.

For answer, I clung to her hand, and we walked the rest of the way in silence.

The snow still lay whitely on the north side of the stone fences and along the edge of the woods. But the ground was brown under our feet, and the day mild for February, with a grayish-blue haze softening the peaks and shoulders of the distant mountains,

and in the zenith, fleecy, sleepy clouds more like autumn than winter. A cow-bell tinkled far-off and lazily; a robin-redbreast sunned his waistcoat on a cedar-twigg after an early supper upon the sweetly-bitter berries; a gray rabbit limped leisurely across the road in front of us to his form in the evergreen thicket. Nature did not dream as yet of spring, but in slumber remembered that summer had been.

The "Dominie's lot" was on the southern slope of the rural cemetery, clear of snow, and comparatively dry. The low sun shone pleasantly there; east rosy shadows among the irregular clods of the unsodded grave.

"Mrs. West has promised to see that this is made smooth and green by summer-time," said the Mother, lovingly, "and to plant flowers about my Harry's head, as I did about his sisters."

She brought out from a basket on her arm, leaves and sprays she had clipped from her plants before sending the pots to Mrs. West's for safe-keeping, and dividing these with me, began arranging hers in the form of a cross upon Harry's grave. I took mine to the other side of the enclosure to a longer mound, without headstone or tablet, but on which the turf was clean and firm, showing, as did the shapely hemlock at the head, that careful hands had tended it.

My very own mother! Tears blinded me while I disposed my simple offering above the heart from which mine had caught its life and throb. The poor mother-heart! It dawned—no—glowed upon me all in

one instant, how it must have ached in the parting with her first-born and only child ;—the weakling between whom and chillest charity there stood but one woman's life, and that one not of her own blood or name. She was buried in December I knew, the 5th of that darksome month being my birth-day. Who, beside the Mother and Papa, stood by her grave, as the cold earth covered her in for all time ? Who, besides myself and her childhood's friend, faithful and fond forever, when she had once given her love, still mourned her—the pretty young mother whose face I only knew from study of her miniature ? yet whom not having seen, I loved ! I had not felt, until now, that I was leaving her in going to Old Harbor, but the isolated grave looked lonely and forsaken when I recollected how far away I should be to-morrow night. I had a fancy that she would feel my removal, the cessation of my visits as cruel desertion, and my heart smote me at the imagination. The excitement by which mind and body had been upborne for many days, culminated in a fit of passionate weeping. I embraced the turf-bound mound, upbraiding myself for heartless forgetfulness—crying out that I could not leave it ; that I would not ; I had rather die and be buried with her than go away where I could never see her grave again !

The Mother lifted me without a word, and I wept myself calm in her arms, before she interposed with verbal consolation or argument. While I leaned upon her shoulder, she stroked my hair tenderly ; twice

kissed my forehead. At the second caress, I raised myself to an upright posture.

"It was very foolish, I know," I stammered. "But I felt as if I could not bear it—as if I had never loved her so dearly before. If she had only lived!"

"She did not wish to live. She was thankful when Death came," the Mother said, solemnly. "So was I, for her; yet I, too, loved her dearly."

"Was she very unhappy?" I was compelled to ask.

"Yes, dear; bowed down with many sorrows."

"More than you have had, Mother?" glancing at the three short graves near by.

"Much more. Griefs greater, and harder to be borne."

"My father's death was one, I know," I said, thoughtfully. "You told me that she lost him before she died. Had she no friend living except you? No relations? And have I none?"

As I questioned I thought how strange it was I had never pushed my inquiries in this direction before; I suppose because I had not known the need of other kindred than the family of which I was a part.

"She was an only child and an orphan. My father was her guardian. We two were brought up as sisters. It was natural that she should turn to me in the day of trouble. My daughter—for she gave you to me—it is growing late. We must go."

She re-tied my bonnet under my chin, after putting back my disordered curls. Her clear, grave eyes were kind as ever, and I dared, although perceiving her

disinclination to pursue the subject, to catechize her once more.

"Mand Farley was my mother's name. What was my father's? Mamma, how queer of me not to know *that*! Had he no relations? Are none of them living?"

She stooped to alter the position of a geranium-leaf upon my mother's grave. I could not see her face as she replied:

"His name was Warren Van Coyne. He was my second cousin."

"Then I *am* related to you!" I cried, excitedly. "How glad I am! Why didn't you tell me so, long ago?"

She was never stern with me, but she was very decided—very serious in confronting me now.


"When you are old enough to understand my reasons for not doing so, you shall hear them, May. Until then trust me, and repeat to *no one* what I have told you this afternoon."





CHAPTER XI.

OLD HARBOR.

LEEPY and respectable, quaint, with an old-fashioned gentility that scorned meretricious showiness, Old Harbor stretched itself in decent wise upon the Eastern bank of a river with an Indian name, and twice in the twenty-four hours dipped its feet in the brackish tide backing up from the sea.

There were warehouses, mostly black with damp, on the wharves; cotton and paper mills in the lower and newer part of the town, where the river was wider and deeper and the shipping more abundant than in Old Harbor very proper, but the dwellers and toilers in that region received but slight notice from the "best people." These were, nearly all of them, connected, more or less closely, with the institutions of learning that gave the place character and importance. About the grim, grey walls of the college, the habitations of professors, tutors, *literati*, and their social compeers clustered as steel filings collect about a magnet, something of the staid desultoriness observable in ferrugi-

nous particles thus attracted marking their order. Smart houses, there were none on the classic hills ; of modern, few ; and these were not in high repute.

Mr. Fortescue had occupied a large rambling homestead on the principal eminence back of the college, and to the left of the business portion of the town. It had a square, peaked roof and a rounded centre, including the wide entrance hall and a room on each side, bulging into the embrace of a narrow portico with amazingly slender pillars. The first-story rooms were spacious and lofty ; those on the second and third floors had been partitioned into students' dormitories—small, but comfortable. The windows at the back were shaded by a row of maples ; those in front overlooked the river through the luxuriant streamers of ivy and Virginia creeper. The garden surrounded the building on three sides. It was well stocked with fruit-trees, currant and raspberry-bushes, and at the angles formed by the straight, broad walks were clumps of lilacs and snow-balls, their stems hoary with moss ; thickets of cinnamon and damask roses, white and red, with here and there a frame tottering under the weight of a honeysuckle ; or, standing up erect and stiff, a calycanthus tree. There was a delicious odor of antiquity about it all, from the dim garret that smelled of red cedar and camphor, to the cellar redolent of last winter's store of apples, and the cool, dark dairy, walled off from the rest, always sweetly suggestive of cream and butter. By the time we were fairly domesticated, at least to the extent of believing that

this was home and Wyonoake but a memory, the crocus and hyacinth-beds were in blow, the peach-trees were pink, the lilac-buds gave forth a goodly smell, and, strolling from alley to alley, I dreamed of Evelyn's "pleasances" and Shakespeare's pleached walks and thymy banks, until I forgot that I was not to the manner born, and in what century I was living.

I shall never know and love another garden as I did that. There were odd, seductive nooks among grapevines and enclosed by box hedges, with crazy boards or flat stones for seats, and ruined bee-hives lining the fence at the rear, and, actually, the remains of a summer-house under a giant apple-tree. Ronald and Carl had a merry time patching this up, one Saturday in March, and we children caught an indefinite series of colds in the effort to use it as a study, in season and out. Nothing could be more delightful in the abstract than to learn our lessons in a real arbor. Nothing was more prosaic and depressing than to sit huddled together for warmth on a moist bench, our feet upon the wetter ground, our shivering bodies wrapped in shawls and comforters, and our chattering teeth chopping Latin into infinitesimal quantities; the east wind forcing water into our eyes faster than we could wipe it out.

Felix was the first to acknowledge the wretched humbug.

"Academic shades"—he said one April day, as a drop of very cold rain fell from the sullen sky upon his Virgil, another striking his nose as he looked up to

see where the former came from—"academic shades are very fine things in their way, I don't doubt. But has it never occurred to this honorable company that there will be more of them here when these stubborn old creepers overhead have leaves on—that, even when we take the Marchioness's advice and 'make believe very hard,' this will hardly pass for the genuine article?"

There was but one rational answer to this view of the situation. We gave it in an incontinent retreat to the fire-lit snugness of the Mother's sitting-room.

Whether we had, in consequence of these dampers upon our original enthusiasm, "taken a scunner," as the Scotch have it, to the *al fresco* study, or that when under less coy skies and more genial showers the fast-growing foliage thatched the ricketty structure, we forbore to interfere with Papa's evident partiality for the sheltered corner, I do not now recollect. But by the first of June it was tacitly recognized by all as his withdrawing-room. Ronald constructed a rustic table for his books, and laid a board floor, and on every fine morning he, or one of his brothers, carried out a cushioned arm-chair from the house; brought it back before dew-fall in the evening. For Papa needed arm-chair, and dry floor, and loving tending nowadays. He had brought a slight but obstinate cough with him to Old Harbor.

"It would soon wear away," the Mother persuaded herself and us. "He had been overworked and much tried in nerves, and the influenza he had contracted in

that fearful snow-storm still clung about him. For a few weeks he must rest, without thought of engaging in any settled occupation, unless he chose to attend to the children's lessons. The change of scene and air must do him good. Why not?"

Yet we had to own that the remedial effects of these were slow in development. He was never sick, if he was to be credited, when interrogated about his health. He had no pain, and what loss of appetite or sleeplessness harassed him were but temporary inconveniences. He heard and explained our daily tasks with conscientious regularity, usually gathering us about him in the arbor, where he would linger during the sunniest hours, reading and thinking. He seldom touched pen or pencil. This impressed us as singular at first, accustomed as we were to seeing him bend, all day long, above his beloved MS., leaving it reluctantly when summoned by the call of other duties, but we presently ceased to remark it. He was apparently happy, with a serenity of content foreign to the Wyanoake days, in the methodical tenor of his present life. Occasionally a gray-haired class-mate, or other friend of the olden time, would share his embowered retreat; or a professor from college or seminary, open the little gate in the garden-fence and join him for an hour, talking learnedly of matters suggested by the book on his table or knee, enjoying the quiet of the spot and the placid beauty of the picture closing up the vista beneath the boughs of apple, pear, and plum-trees. He was pleased at these visits, but he sought the society of none beyond

his home, shrinking, as I can now see, from intercourse with those who might eye him with critical, although not, perhaps, unfriendly curiosity. Soon after his arrival in Old Harbor he had been invited by the pastors of the Reformed Dutch and Presbyterian churches to preach in their pulpits, and by the President of the college to officiate one Sabbath in the chapel. The Mother glanced wistfully at him on each of these occasions, and we children looked our delight and entreaty, but his answer was the same to all.

“He was grateful for the brotherly kindness manifested, but he was hardly fit for pulpit work just now.”

The dozen students who sat daily at the Mother’s board liked and respected her husband, often calling forth a flash of energy by appeal to him upon knotty points of theology and other sciences. He was a walking Encyclopædia of literature and language, they said, among themselves, and sometimes, in their admiration of his marvellous erudition, broke into open praise in his presence. To compliment and to query he hearkened with his grave, tremulous smile and a lighting up of the brown eyes, that was slow to die out. Frequently his only notice of their animated commendation was a gentle, scarcely perceptible shake of the head. Gay and thoughtless collegians who were nettles in the considering-caps of their preceptors, and the bane of sedate citizens who loved sleep o’ nights and preferred to find their own and not their neighbors’ signs above their doors and their own gates in front of

them in the morning, were among our boarders. They made meal-times merry, and were not always in their rooms at canonical hours, but in nothing did they seriously transgress against the mild rule of the household. The Mother was to them an honored queen, before they had known her a month.

A mellow lustre, like that of a moonlit harvest evening, overspreads for me those early months of our sojourn in the sleepy college-town. The days were long; the nights restful. Nobody was in a hurry about anything. Even the college bell never sounded an alarum. Its legato humming at matins, noon and even-tide, was rather like the drowsy tinkle of Grey's lowing herd, winding slowly o'er the lea; a lulling singing in the ears of Old Harbor, periodical and chronic, that awakened no sensation in the body civic or academic. True, a railroad had been laid amid deep deprecation and futile remonstrance through the shrinking heart of the ancient and honorable town, whereat the tradespeople and *parvenus* rejoiced greatly, predicting amazing growth and unparalleled enterprise—a pulverization of fossils and overgrowth of lusty new life. As if anything short of a Lisbonic earthquake could make a stirring place of Old Harbor! In vain the locomotive screamed, and loaded trains thundered tri-daily and nightly in traversing the sacred precincts, trailing flaunting banners of smoke athwart the college windows, and scattering bushels of cinders upon the hundred-year-old turf of the campus. At the utmost, the commotion produced by the innovation was only as if

the respectable corporation had snored uneasily in its dreams, then turned over to sleep again.

May passed, and a rarely lovely June, fervid without sultriness, efflorescent without humidity, blessed town, homestead, and garden. We recited all our lessons out of doors now, but they were brief and few. The Mother insisted upon this.

"Much study is a weariness to the flesh of growing children in warm weather," she argued.

Papa did not oppose her. Except that he still walked to church once on Sabbath, leaning on Ronald's arm, he seldom set foot beyond the garden bounds. His shoulders were more bent; his chest hollower; his hands, no longer embrowned by farm work, were thin and quivering. The friendly physician across the way dropped in almost every day, in passing, to ask how his neighbor did, and, in an off-hand way, advised tonics, plenty of beef, and nourishing possets, in the manufacture of which the Mother excelled. And still we said among ourselves that he would be stronger by and by. There was no active disease, only such prostration of nervous and muscular forces as might happen, in like circumstances, to the most robust of mortal mould.

"I can see no reason why you should not look forward confidently to his ultimate recovery, madam. His system has lost tone, but I hope much from time and good nursing," I heard the neighborly doctor affirm, one afternoon in the middle of the month.

I was passing through the hall as he said "Good-

day" to his hostess on the front stoop. They spoke of Papa, I knew, for Dr. Brownson had spent the last half hour with him in the arbor. A chill ran through me. Questioning on this subject implied possible uneasiness on the Mother's part. Without waiting to talk with her or to be seen, I flew in an unreasoning panic down the back steps to hide myself in the garden alleys, staying at length behind a tall box-tree to recover breath and thought.

The air was saturated with sunshine and perfume, resonant with Summer sounds. A colony of vagrant bees had settled in one of the tumble-down hives, and they were abroad to a drone; diving headforemost into the honeysuckle trumpets, where they fitted so tightly that they had to kick their way valiantly back to daylight; tearing with legs and mandibles at half-blown roses, and gilding their busy bodies from hip to crest with the gold dust of lily-hearts. Saucy sparrows fluttered from under my very feet, to perch upon branches I could have touched with my hand, cocked their heads knowingly, and twittered inquisitively at my approach. There was a blue-bird's nest in the hollow of the King apple-tree in the middle of the garden, and the young ones were noisy over their supper. I had halted in front of a huge mass of cinnamon roses, so numerous and widely open one could scarcely see stems or green leaves for the flowers; and while I stood there a brace of living jewels—humming birds—flashing emeralds and rubies and topazes be-

fore my dazzled sight, hovered over the pink and spicy banquet.

“The world is very beautiful, my God!
I thank Thee that I live!”

The quotation escaped me in a sigh of ecstasy. Every drop of my young blood was astir, and, I could have believed, perfumed by the subtle witchery of the hour. How absurd had been the imagination of death on such an evening! I would ramble on to the summer-house, not anxiously, but that I might have a sunset chat with Papa. Albert, Mark, and I had stopped at his arm-chair an hour ago, to show him the famous basket of strawberries we had picked for supper. He had greeted us pleasantly, praised our industry, admired the fruit, and smilingly accepted the leaf-cup we had filled with the largest and most luscious we could find. He had never been more genial in bearing or speech.

Why should my heart ache in remembering that his hand shook in receiving our gift, and that the lips to which I playfully held a juicy, scarlet berry were dry, and crossed by fever-lines?





CHAPTER XII.

PISGAH.

THE summer-house opened toward the west, and the glory of the sunset was at its height when I reached it. A tender glory it was,—not the long-drawn-out scarlet and gold pomps that belong to July and August, or the flaming crimson of September skies. The light reflected from the motionless clouds that veiled the day-god's parting upon the solitary figure in the rustic bower, was pale, warm, clear purple, flushed ever so slightly with rose. I saw the same hne the other day, strained through a cluster of grapes which had grown upon a vine transplanted from Mt. Lebanon.

Papa leaned on the arms of his chair; his hands were folded together; his eyes drank in the singular beauty of the scene with delight that was artless as a child's. I was at his elbow before he was aware of my approach, but he manifested no surprise at seeing me near.

“Ah, my little maid!” he said affectionately, putting

out his arm to draw me to his side, "I have not seen a sunset just like this in many years,—more than twenty, I think. Once in a while—a score of times, perhaps, in each life-time—God drops us a hint of the things He is preparing for those who love Him."

We were quiet for a minute before he added in the dreamy tone of one who saw further than the eye led his musings:

"The twelfth was an amethyst!"

The bees hummed over the beds of thyme and lavender at the door of the summer-house; the bird sang a hush-a-by to her young; the pink-purple flush spread in broadening waves, to the zenith,—was clearer and more tender with each moment of silence. Tears of happy awe filled my eyes, but I could not speak. The click of the gate-latch was sharply distinct in the evening stillness, as was the firm, quick tread on the gravel-walk. Papa smiled, without moving, or releasing me.

"We are enjoying the sunset, my son," he said to Ronald—"waiting just outside the pearly gates; basking in the excellent glory that flows through the amethystine layer—the cap-stone of the wall."

Ronald sat down at our feet on the one step of the arbor.

Have I ever told you what a noble-looking *man* he had grown to be? He was now, although just nineteen years old, six feet high, broad of shoulder, deep-chested, and straight as a palm. His features were his mother's, but cast in a bolder mould. Intellect commanded the beholder's respect from its throne on

the symmetrical head and well-developed brow. Feeling and fancy shone in the eyes, and unboyish depth and strength of character were stamped on every lineament,—most decidedly on chin and mouth. While he watched the changing tints of the clouds, his father's regards wandered to his face and lingered there. For this was his first-born—the man he had gotten from the Lord, tender and beloved in the sight of his mother. Ronald remained unconscious of the scrutiny, and I, who watched the two covertly, was yet startled when Papa's wasted hand was laid upon the bared head on a level with his knee, and a fervent ejaculation ended the eloquent pause.

“My son! I thank my God upon every remembrance of you! You have helped me see some things without the knowledge of which I could hardly have laid down my grey head on its last pillow in peace. I have more extended, juster views of earthly existence, the sublime plan of human life, than were formerly mine. I was thinking awhile ago, sitting here alone, of a pretty fairy-tale I heard the Mother tell you children, one winter twilight, when she thought me asleep upon the lounge after a wearying day of pastoral labor among the mountains. You may recollect it, May? the story of the pious little girl who essayed to finish the spinning her sick mother had been obliged to give up, and worked at it far into the long cold night, until, worn out, she dropped to the floor in a dead sleep. Then the angels came and finished the task for her. The purpose of our being, the mis-

sion appointed to every man and woman in this world will be accomplished whether each finishes his course for himself with rejoicing, or faints and falls by the way.

“My boy! your father has been—the world and the church will tell you—an unsuccessful man. Don’t interrupt me!” for Ronald had made a gesture of impetuous entreaty. “The pain has gone out of the thought after years of unavailing wrestling with the terrible truth. At my Harry’s grave, I said from the lowest deep of my humbled soul—‘Even so, Father! for so it seemeth good in Thy sight!’ From that hour to this, I have known the blessedness—the peace which passeth understanding—of a will at one with His. I read, that night, with a new appreciation of its meaning, the history of Paul’s thrice-denied supplication; cast myself, with the weight of twenty years’ discouragements and strivings and unavailing cries to Him in whose service I would fain have been an honored vessel, upon the ‘sufficient grace’—and *rested!*”

“This afternoon I have had more than rest. I have had a revelation which is compensation. I remember how the man of God who had seen Jehovah, face-to-face, and pleaded boldly with Him as man with man, vainly besought Him—‘I pray Thee, let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan;—that goodly mountain’—which he had beheld in wistful dreams—poor Moses! ‘and Jericho’—the ‘goodly’ city which was to fall before the stately march of the priests, and the mighty shout of the chosen people!

Recalling the final negative—‘Let it suffice thee! speak no more unto me of this matter!’—I have been moved to wonder and praise by the gracious miracle the Lord yet wrought in His servant’s behalf. He might not pass over, but his vision was strengthened that he saw it all—that glorious Canaan—unto the utmost sea, even the palm-trees in the valley of Jericho, unto little Zoar—this the Lord Himself ‘showed him,’ before He buried him in that unknown sepulchre in the land of Moab.

“For six years, I had been denied the knowledge that my unworthy effort had directed a single soul to the Saviour; had bewailed myself, night and day, that none believed my report. ‘Woe is me!’ had been the key-note of every prayer. Then, the Father laid His hand upon my lips, and said, ‘Let it suffice thee!’ and I obeyed. To-day—within the hour—He has given me such joyfulness of assurance that the threads I have dropped, knotted and broken, shall be taken up by your hands and wrought into firmness and beauty, that your life shall be joined on to mine, and in your successful labor for the Master, I shall see (‘whether in or out of the body I cannot tell—God knoweth!’) of the travail of my groaning years, and be satisfied—that my lips must utter forth His praise—a pæan, which is a *Nunc dimittis*!”

I was sobbing on Papa’s shoulder by this time, holding his head tightly within my arms, with a vague impulse of shielding him from what sounded like self-accusations, severe as they were undeserved. It hurt

me, although it had lost its sting to him, to admit that, so far as man saw, he had spent strength and life for naught. Of the six years' barren record I had heard before, and often. Elders, deacons, and unofficial brethren had wearied me, if not the Lord, at every prayer-meeting during that time, in lamentations that "the ways of Zion mourned because none came up to her solemn feasts;" meaning the quarterly Communion-Sabbath. Elder Sears had latterly added to the time-worn figure of Paul's planting and Apollos' watering, the bolder one:—"In vain do Aaron and Hur uphold the heavy hands of Moses in this community."

Though, where the heaviness and the upholding came in, we youngsters, in our warm partisanship, failed to see.

Ronald did not answer immediately. When he did, his voice was husky and uneven.

"With God's help, I will try to play the man, father. But He sees more correctly than men do. He knows your works, and charity, and service, and faith, and *patience*. He knows, moreover, what we can never tell you aright, that the memory of these is the richest legacy you could leave to your children. To us, your life has been the model of Christian heroism, since we were old enough to distinguish our right hands from our left. If I am ever accredited as Christ's ambassador, and as such gain a favorable hearing from my fellow-men, I shall owe it all, under Heaven, to you and to the Mother!"

He bent his forehead upon his clasped hands.

The delicate, wavering fingers rested again among the dark masses of his hair, and the sweet, gentle voice that had not once faltered during the (for Papa) long recital to which we had listened as for our lives, said, solemnly :

“ The God before whom my fathers did walk, the God which fed me all my life long until this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lad ! ”

In my ignorance of ecclesiastical form and *prestige*, I bethought myself that license nor ordination could set aside Ronald more fitly to the duties of his sacred office, than did that benediction.

Papa rose of his own accord to go into the house, remarking that the dew would be on the grass before the beauty of the sunset waned. Ronald gave him his arm, motioning me to stay where I was.

“ Don’t try to bring the chair in,” he said aloud. “ I will come back for it.”

I knew he had something to say to me, so sat down on the step to await his pleasure. The bees had gone home, the birds were fast asleep, the clouds were growing cold and opaque before he rejoined me, and I was in a tremor of suspense and nervous agitation. A look at my colorless face told him this. He took a seat beside me, and chafed my numb fingers kindly but not gayly.

“ You are making yourself wretched, Maysie, with the idea that our father is seriously ill. The Mother

and Dr. Brownson are sanguine in their belief that he will recover. She told me, to-day, of their plan for taking him to the sea-shore, in vacation. He has no active disease whatever, the doctor assures us. Say nothing to the Mother or to the boys about his talk, this afternoon. He is dwelling in the land of Beulah now. The Master sometimes grants those who have fought a great fight, a long sojourn there, until their wounds are quite healed. Nevertheless," his features fixed in sorrowful sternness, "when my father dies, it will be of a broken heart! Mark that!"

"But Ronald, he says he is happy—at peace."

"I believe it; but the deadly hurt was dealt months ago. That he is resigned, that, if he is bleeding to death, it is without pain or regret, is of God's mercy to His faithful servant. It is not the work of man. Don't cry again, my blessed child! The Mother has enough to bear already. We will help her to hope."

It seems to me that Commencement was held very soon after this talk in the garden, but a month must have intervened before we were in the flood-tide of preparation for that event—for it fell upon the fiercest day of a fiery July. Commencement-days have everywhere a mysterious influence upon the mercury. If this were chronicled upon the index scales in such blunt phrase as is used by barometer makers, "*Set hot*" would be forever associated in the memories of puffing, perspiring celebrants, with Commencement week.

Ronald—"our Ron"—had taken the highest class-honor, and was to be the valedictorian of the day. It

was no more than he deserved and we had expected, so we had told one another since the prizes were awarded, and we believed that we were prepared to behold with sublime calmness, his public triumph. But, as the day drew near, we—one and all—participated in the universal flutter that almost unsettled the well-bred drowsiness of Old Harbor.

There were preliminaries of society-suppers and farewell calls, with the not unfrequent *sequitur* of a matrimonial engagement, and much rosetting of green and blue ribbon into badges; a spirited display of muslin, white kids, and palm-leaf fans in haberdashers' windows; portentous scrubbing of floors and paint, of hanging fresh curtains, of baking, boiling, and beating up "good things" on the part of hospitable housekeepers, that would have betrayed to any one but an ignoramus who had never been before in a college-town—if the thermometer had not!—what was almost upon us.

Almost—for the Mother declared, finally, that there was nothing more for me to do in kitchen, pantry, or cellar; that her pretty and savory arrangements for the important day were so near completion, I could with a clear conscience, grant myself a breathing spell. I made myself cool and tidy in a pink lawn, and elected to enjoy my hour of rest in Papa's society. The warm weather told perceptibly upon his vitality. By degrees, the arbor sittings were given up. The out-of-door glare sometimes brought on a sick-headache, or vertigo. Once, he had sunk to the ground in sudden

dizziness, and the exertion of climbing the piazza-steps provoked distressing spasms of palpitation and shortness of breath. But in-doors, especially in the Mother's sitting-room, shaded, and fresh with all the air that could be coaxed into northern and eastern windows, with the rarely-failing river breeze blowing back the white curtains, and making a delicious rustle among the ivy and creeper leaves at evening; with his favorite book within reach, and some of us always within call of the bell on the stand beside his sofa, he was "entirely comfortable."

This was his phrase, uttered heartily and thankfully to every inquirer. To friends—not acquaintances—he added, "and very happy! I am resting!"

The white dress I was to wear next day was done, except that I had to baste lace in the neck and sleeves, and to attach a shoulder-knot of blue—the color of the Literary Society to which Ronald and Carl belonged. I sang a merry little ditty, seated on a low ottoman by Papa's window, as I plied my needle, and he tapped time to it on the back of the book closed upon his finger, smiling indulgently at my air of delightful importance and excitement.

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" I interrupted myself to say, drawing a long breath and holding up the dainty summer-attire. "When I think of it, I feel as if I could *not* wait?"

I dropped the dress, and started to my feet, while the words were still on my tongue.

The window opened to the floor, and out upon the

terrace of the garden, the hill on which the house was built falling away abruptly on that side. A gentleman who had probably entered the grounds by the front gate, and been guided by the sound of my voice, in this direction, stood on the upper ledge of the terrace, looking full at me.





CHAPTER XIII.

VALE!

I THINK I have mentioned elsewhere, that Papa had showed, since our arrival in Old Harbor, a nervous dread of meeting strangers. My instant impulse, therefore, being to save him from intrusion, I stepped through the window, letting the curtain fall behind me, and confronted the unseasonable visitor, I fear, with more discomposure than courtesy. He lifted his hat, and stood uncovered during the dialogue that ensued.

"I beg pardon for my apparent rudeness," he began, respectfully, "but I rang in vain at the front door. I imagine the bell-wire is broken" (which proved afterwards to be the case). "If I have been correctly informed, this is the residence of Rev. Mr. Hedden."

"It is," I answered. "But he is not well enough to see company."

I had moved some steps away from the window, out of Papa's possible sight and hearing.

"I am grieved to hear of his indisposition. I trust it is only temporary," yet more politely. "But my

visit is rather to *Mrs.* Hedden. Is she at home and disengaged?"

I need not have colored at the recollection that the Mother was at that minute in the kitchen, making out the French rolls that were to grace the supper-table for their "last rising," for she dignified the most menial occupation; but in the presence of this distinguished-looking personage, my cheeks burned foolishly and my eyes fell. How should I convey to his refined senses an apology which should be, at once, truthful and graceful?

"Perhaps," the stranger came to my relief,—“perhaps it would be more convenient and agreeable to her were I to call at some other time?—say to-morrow, since Mr. Hedden is not well this afternoon.”

His hesitating speech made me look at him again, and more closely than I had done before. He was very unlike the men I was accustomed to seeing; in fact, different from any other I had ever met. An antiquated exquisite of the first water, I should style him, were I to see him or one of his kind, now. Then I was puzzled whether to regard him as a young old gentleman, or as an old young one. He was bald on the temples and brushed his hair forward to hide it. Gleams of gold plugs and prongs about his teeth showed that their preservation and comeliness were a matter of importance with the owner, and he wore a full, drooping moustache, streaked and fringed with grey, that inclined me to set him down as a foreigner, such facial ornaments being little affected by Americans, at that

day. His shirt-front was a frill, neatly folded inside of his white waistcoat, the glossy plaits fastened in the middle with a sparkling pin. Despite the heat of the day, his coat was buttoned a trifle tightly at the waist, and evidently padded above, to give an additional effect of slenderness of girth and width of chest. His pantaloons were strapped closely upon feet effeminate in smallness, and encased in the glossiest of boots. The left hand was gloved—the right, white and trim, held a hat as fashionable as was the rest of his apparel.

I made this inventory in the flash of an eye, deciding that he was a Frenchman, who had been handsome, and was still super-elegant; also, that it was uncomfortable to be stared at, as he was gazing at me; finally, crimsoning with agony, and turning half away from him, in the conviction that the “birth-mark” on my cheek had earned for me the doubtful honor of his scrutiny. I always thought of it, sooner or later, when people looked earnestly at me; had a trick, of which the Mother and Ronald had tried hard to break me, of covering it with my hand when greatly confused by such observation. I felt my left hand stealing up now, against my will, and checked it, mid-way. All this dumb show passed in less than thirty seconds. Not forty had elapsed before I summoned courage to reply to the stranger’s last remark:

“I am afraid—indeed I am sure that she is very busy, at present. If you would not mind waiting in the parlor I could take a message to her, if you wish to see her on business—”

I could get no further for the increased intentness of his stare.

"You are her daughter, then?"

"I am May Hedden," I rejoined, laconically. "I will take your card or message to my mother."

"Thank you! but I will not trouble you, I think. I will call to-morrow. At what hour shall I be most likely to find your mother disengaged!"

"Not until quite late in the day," said I, more at my ease in the returning flush of pride in "our boy."

"My eldest brother graduates to-morrow, and as his will be the concluding oration—the valedictory—we will, of course, stay in the church until the commencement exercises are over."

"Ah! allow me to congratulate you!" bowing anew, the ends of his moustache twitching upward in a manner I chose to consider excessively disagreeable. I fancied he was laughing at me, and shrank back distressedly into my shell. "I am happy to hear that the son of my old friends is distinguishing himself thus early in life. He is not, then, your only brother?"

"No, sir. I have three others living."

"And sisters, too, I suppose?"

"I am the only girl in the family,"—shortly, for the catechism was becoming irksome to me.

"Indeed! I thought—I imagined I had heard that there were several daughters. But I have lost sight of Mrs. Hedden for some years."

"She buried two baby-girls the winter I was born;"

I was forced by his keen, black eyes to be communicative whether I would or no.

“How sad!” in conventional condolence.

It was plain, even to my unsophisticated eyes, that he was thinking of something else while he spoke. He mused for an instant.

“I shall pay my respects to her, then, to-morrow evening, if she can receive me at that time. Please accept my thanks for your polite attention to a stranger, and my apologies for trespassing upon your time and patience.”

He bowed low again, and moved away, at a jaunty gait, swinging his cane as he strode down the quiet street, and picked his way over the dusty crossing.

The Mother could form no plausible conjecture as to who he was from my description, and dismissed the matter with her usual calm philosophy, by saying—“We shall know in good time,—when to-morrow evening comes, if not before.”

She was too busy to dwell long upon uncertainties. The students brought friends with them to supper and to breakfast, and early the next morning the whole town was in a bustle. By half-past eight Ronald entered the sitting-room to say, “Good-morning” to Papa, for the procession was to form on the campus at nine, for the march to the church. Papa was brighter and stronger than he had been for weeks. His wan face reflected the brightness of the young, ardent one that hung over it.

“My boy! my boy!” he said, in a sort of passion of

affection. "I have known few happier days than this. If I were a little stronger I could not deny myself the delight of hearing your speech. But thanks to your kindness in giving her a copy, the Mother will be able to read it to me before she goes to the church. I shall follow you in every sentence,—please myself with imaginings of how you will utter it. The Lord be with you!"

He drew the tall collegian down and kissed him, as he had when he could just totter across the floor to his outstretched arms.

Ronald dashed the water from his eyes, in bidding the rest of us a merry adieu.

"I shall see you at the church, Mother! Don't come too late. Cromer will be on the look-out for you, and give you a good seat."

She was to stay with Papa until near the hour set for the valedictory, when she would leave him for a season, to the care of our faithful servant-woman.

The great church was packed to suffocation. There was not a puff of air except the spasmodic waves produced by the countless fans in vigorous exercise, all over the audience, and these were chiefly perceptible by the eddies in the sheets of dust that poured in through the windows. Without, was the dry breath of a furnace, the roll of wheels and the hum of voices sounding like the roar of ascending flames. Within,—steam arising from overheated human bodies and laboring lungs, and the perfume of drooping bouquets intended to grace the youthful speakers' triumphs.

The crash of the brass band in the gallery was deafening; there were seventeen speeches, long and short, stupid, tolerable, and creditable, and we sat wedged in our places for six mortal hours, our tongues cleaving to the roofs of our mouths with heat and thirst.

But it was entrancing! hot and glorious! Felix and I, from our seats in the foremost row in the side-gallery, simmered and melted and were happier than we had ever been before in our lives. Happiest of all was the thrilling minute when our Ronald, stately and self-possessed, and looking every inch the orator, in his flowing black silk gown, advanced to the front of the rostrum and bowed—as none of his predecessors had bowed—we nudged one another to say. I believe I cried outright for joy. Felix had infinite difficulty in tugging his handkerchief from his pocket, and two big drops plashed from his cheeks upon his shirt-front before he succeeded. The flourishing rub he gave his forehead, and his whispered “Whew!” imposed upon me as little as it did upon other spectators. I only felt that it was weak in him to be ashamed of any demonstration of feeling into which the excitement of the supreme moment might betray him. Then I forgot everything else in the exquisite rapture of hearkening to our boy’s valedictory. I do not remember one word of it. When I would try to bring it back, there steals over me a faint return of the golden mist in which my senses and imagination floated, while his voice—always a marvel of strength and clearness in one of his age—rang through the church. I dreamed of Demosthenes’

thunder, and Pericles' chaste periods, and Alcibiades' fascination of tone and manner; of Pitt and Burke; of Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee; and honestly believed in my loyal soul, that the stripling then on the stage combined the finest powers of all. He was interrupted by frequent bursts of applause, and at last came one, tumultuous and prolonged, that proclaimed the conclusion of the entertainment for the multitude.

For us there was in store the pleasure of rehearsing the scenes of the day in our home-talk.

"Hurry!" I whispered to Felix, as we battled for deliverance from the throng. "I am just wild to tell Papa all about it. There's no use looking for the Mother in this crowd. Mr. Cromer will see her home. He said that he would. And Albert can make his own way. We will go through the church-yard, and up the back streets. We can get along twice as fast as if we took the regular route."

Through the church-yard we scampered accordingly, taking an air-line for home, with little regard or respect for the sleepers under the flat stones over which we vaulted, and reached the upper street, hotter than ever, but with unflagging spirits.

"There's the Frenchman I told you about!" I ejaculated, when within half a square of home. "I hope he isn't going in to see the Mother now. That would spoil everything!"

"Walk more slowly, so that he can speak to us, and we will tell him she is not in," counselled my compan-

ion, subjoining irreverently under his breath, "What a swell he is!"

By thus timing our progress, we met the visitor at the bottom of our piazza-steps. His bow was as grand, his smile as bland, his dress neat and speckless as upon the preceding day.

"I have determined to leave your interesting town by the afternoon train," he said to me. "But I am reluctant to do so without fulfilling my engagement to call upon Mrs. Hedden—your mother."

"She is not at home yet, sir!" blurted out Felix, the unquenchable.

"Ah! I am sorry. I regret it exceedingly." But he did not look as if he did. "May I trouble you with my card?"

He took out a mother-of-pearl note-case, mounted with gold, and extracted a card from it with the tips of his white fingers.

"If you will be so kind as to say to her—" he was addressing me when Ronald rushed across the street, having come up the hill by a route still more direct than that which we had taken.

He was pale, while we were red with our run in the heat of that scorching afternoon.

"May!" he gasped, without noticing the stranger. "Where is the Mother? Have you seen her?"

"Wasn't she at church?" said Felix and I, in a breath.

"No! Cromer is sure she was not, and I could see her nowhere while I was speaking, or afterward. Something must be wrong!"

He went up the steps at a bound, and we followed, "our hearts failing us for nameless and awful fear. Nothing but the gravest catastrophe, we felt, could have hindered the proud and tender parent from being an eye-witness of the triumph of her first-born. The front door was open; the house was still as a tomb except for the hurrying echoes of our feet, as we ran through the hall to the sitting-room.

At the threshold of this we were arrested by a wild cry, the like of which, for anguish and appeal, I pray Heaven may never again smite my ears. It was the Mother's voice, strained almost beyond recognition by a grief the weight and suddenness of which had taken even her trusting, steadfast soul by surprise.

"Felix! my husband! my only love! you will not leave me? You have not gone! Come back!"

She had partly raised in her arms the figure that lay among the cushions of the lounge. His cheek was pressed to hers; one hand had fallen over her shoulder, as in a last effort to embrace her; the fixed gaze of the eyes was upward. On the floor were scattered loose sheets of MS., the copy of Ronald's address he had left with his mother. One had fluttered half-way across the room, and horrified as I was, I noted and read the title in large words at the top of the page:

"Valedictory, July 14th, 18—"

Harry's last prayer was answered. Through storm and battle; through fever and unrest; through the

Valley of Humiliation his chastened spirit had learned to love; through the Valley of the Shadow of Death that lost its dreads, or ever he had traversed half its length, "dear Papa had been brought safely home!

"FOR CHRIST'S SAKE! AMEN."





CHAPTER XIV.

SUMMER FRUIT.

HIP! hip! hurrah!" shouted Felix, bounding like a rubber ball into the sitting-room where the Mother and I were at work. "Hurrah for our side!" tossing his cap up to the ceiling and catching it in the descent. "Cromer is to be the new Professor! Unani-mous-ly elected! I begin to think the Trustees and the rest of those fellows are not such dunderheads, after all."

The "rest of those fellows," signifying sundry magnates in the church, which was the nursing-mother of the college, we ought to have reprov'd his irreverent classification. Instead of which, the Mother smiled in genuine satisfaction.

"I am truly happy to hear it. The choice could hardly have fallen upon one better fitted for the position."

"Miss Propriety hasn't a word to say!" The gay collegian pulled back my head to get a view of my features. "It is a matter of profound indifference to

her who fills the vacant chair. But on the whole it is her opinion that some eminent graybeard should have been appointed, instead of a handsome young divine."

I twitched myself free from his hold, picked up the work I had dropped, and tried to speak naturally.

"I am pleased, of course, at the idea of having Mr. Cromer back in Old Harbor. All of us must be. But I regret that he must cease to be a pastor in becoming a Professor."

"Between ourselves, he is much better adapted for the professorship," said Felix, sagacious and confidential. "He is too studious, too scholarly, and too modest to be very popular in a parish. A man should wear his heart outside his waistcoat, and offer it engagingly to be squeezed by every woman and inspected by every man in his congregation; have a preternatural memory for trifles, and a feminine taste for gossip, if he would be a model pastor. The office as man—not God—has made it, is one of the most atrocious humbugs of the day."

"Nevertheless"—the Mother spoke softly: the tone that always commanded our respectful attention—"the Great Teacher went from house to house; was so accessible that the overwrought housewife did not hesitate to lay her complaint before Him. The same eye that took indignant note of the cumbering of the temple with sheep, and oxen, and money-changers, saw with sorrowful pity that she was entangling her earnest soul with the things of this world. The shepherd's duties are manifold. We may not with wisdom—he

cannot, with safety—depreciate the importance of any of these.”

This was often the tenor of her talks and letters to Ronald, who had been for three years the pastor of a village church in another State. It was not her habit to lecture any of us, but her clear insight of the causes which had hampered her husband’s usefulness in his profession, made her very fervent of speech to her son. She probably shrank from setting these in array even to herself. It was only from such hints as the above that we could surmise the current of her thoughts; what were the results of her years of observation and individual trial.

Felix, thus subdued, strolled off, whistling under his breath, to find Albert and tell him the news. The Mother and I sewed on silently for some minutes before she said: “I suppose Carl—whom we must learn to call Professor Cromer—would like to have his old quarters again. Unless he should object to boarding in the same house with so many of the students.”

“He is not one to assume airs of superiority because of his appointment,” I answered, stiffly enough.

She laughed.

“But one who likes a quiet room! I cannot imagine his ‘assuming airs’ of any kind in any circumstances. It will seem *good* to see and be with him once more. I could not be more gratified were he my own son.”

I finished my seam, folded up my work, remarked deliberately, and with a semblance of languor, that the day was sultry, and sauntered—still avoiding the seem-

ing of haste or perturbation—through the window to the terrace, pausing there to pluck a rose-bud and fasten it in my brooch ; then down the grassy steps to the alley leading to the summer-house. All this was instinct—not premeditated deceit. I was myself bewildered by the whirl of emotions stirred within me by Felix's announcement.

Six years had passed since Ronald's graduation-day ; six years and two months since we—he and I—had watched the amethystine sunset from the arbor steps ; heard the saint who was so soon to be translated, speak of the goodly Beyond. I was eighteen years old—still a slim, shy girl to the beholder's eye, but at heart a woman who thought much, dreamed more, and felt most of all. And from the Christmas night when he had found me weeping behind the crimson curtains of Mrs. Wagner's best parlor, Carl Cromer had been the principal figure in my visions of the Future—my Sydney, my Paladin, my Bayard—*par excellence* and *par eminence*, the Prince ! I had never concealed my childish partiality. He was my friend and knight always, for whom I hemmed handkerchiefs and cravats openly, and, by the Mother's permission, darned socks in secret ; by whose plate I laid bouquets every day, from the time the first violet showed itself, to that on which the black frost cut down the latest chrysanthemums ; for whom I stored up rare, ripe fruits and picked out nut-kernels ; in whom I believed and whom I trusted with a pure loyalty of devotion which none but a loving child can feel and maintain. Sometimes—oftener than other-

wise—such lavishment of affection is rather pitiable than pleasant to contemplate, so surely is it foredoomed to disappointment—so easily is it blighted by word, look, or imagined slight. My love had flourished, yet not grown arrogant, under most genial influences. The object of it never overlooked, never forgot me. Even my favorite brother, Ronald, had occasional seasons of abstraction, during which he scarcely noticed me; replied briefly, I thought tartly, to my remarks. From Carl I was sure of the ready smile, always bright and affectionate, for his child-worshipper; the motion, when it was practical and expedient, to draw me nearer to him; the gentle phrase of encouragement if I were timid; of sympathy in my serious and in my gladsome mood. I could never interrupt him, he affirmed, and I doubted this no more than his assertion that he preferred my companionship in walks, in riding and boating parties, to that of any grown-up belle in Old Harbor.

His going from us at the close of his Seminary course almost broke my heart. I shed no tears in his presence, but my pale face, sodden eyelids, and air of utter dejection must have appealed powerfully to his kind heart. He invited me to a long ramble with him on the afternoon of his last day with us, and talked to me of his prospects, his hopes, and aspirations more freely than he had to any one else—so he said:

“Always excepting dear old Ron—my double!” he added. “You could not be jealous of him?”

“No-o—,” hesitatingly,—“I don’t—*think*—I could. But I can’t bear the idea of your forgetting me!”

He laughed—the fresh, boyish laugh that was always his. “You are not complimentary to my memory. I ought to be angry with you for suggesting the possibility. But I can’t be! See here!”

He put a small box into my hand.

“This is to ensure that you shall not forget *me*.”

I uttered a cry of joy on opening it; then the always officious tears obscured my vision of the treasure. It was a likeness of himself—a fine, clear ambrotype, delicately tinted, and on the inside of the cover, under a glass oval set in the satin lining, was a curl of his hair, a dark, rich ring, with a suspicion of gold where the light touched the curves.

We were sitting on a turf bank overlooking the river in the shadow of a great beech-tree. The sunlight, sifted through the leaves, dotted the pictured face, as I studied it,—the face I steadily held to be the handsomest I had ever looked upon, although I believe all the beauty it had to others lay in the eyes, mouth, and peculiarly winning smile. He was very tall—ungainly—said impartial observers, and his inconvenient length of limb was, with himself, the theme of many a jesting lamentation. Hard study—for he was merciless in this respect—had robbed him of youthful ruddiness, made his cheeks hollow, and bowed his shoulders. But he stood first in his class, first in the esteem of his instructors and a majority of his fellow-students; was without blemish and beyond compare in my eyes. He never knew—how could he know, whose modesty was a proverb?—what his fare-

well gift was to me, this seal set by his voluntary act upon our friendship.

"It will do me good always—be a great comfort and help, to remember that you thought enough of me to give me this," I said seriously, even solemnly, glancing from the minature to himself, at last. "If I could thank you, I would. But I don't know how."

"Give me a lock of your hair here and now, and I shall be your debtor," he answered playfully, handing me his pen-knife in default of a pair of scissors.

I cut recklessly into the thick mass when I had loosened it. He might have had it all had he asked it. He laid the tress carefully, with tenderness which I am certain was not feigned, between the leaves of a pocket-diary. On the opposite page, he pinned the button-hole bouquet I had given him that morning,—a sprig of mignonette and one of heliotrope, with one geranium-leaf.

I have lived over the sensations of that moment, a thousand times since, in inhaling the mingled scents of those flowers, when half withered and sweetest; seen the sluggish river at low water, red in the dusty sunshine; the stretches of wet flats left bare by the retreating waves, on both sides of it, washed with the lurid glow that reminded the poet of

"The beach of hell
At ebb of tide;—"

felt the heaviness of the pulseless air; endured again the strange, anguished physical constriction of heart

and throat I strove to bear up against, with all the fortitude fourteen years can oppose to impending separation and fearful looking forward to days, weeks, a lifetime of loneliness. He was going two hundred miles away, to a church well up the long line of the North River. He would have new friends, new interests, new ties. *Our* life—as one and the same—was ended, however pleasant and faithful might be his recollection of the little girl who was his friend's sister and his own adorer. We should never live again under the same roof, as a part of one family. A college-mate would have said all or most of this to him, and how cruel he felt the wrench to be. Being a girl, I did not allow him more than a glimpse of my desolation.

He kissed me “Good-by” the next morning,—the first time he had ever touched my lips, for his delicate tact in such matters was infallible. There were tears in his eyes, as he held my hands and gazed into the grieving depth of mine.

“You have been a blessing to me, May, always! I shall write to you—and you will answer my letters—won't you? to keep me from missing you so *very* badly?”

He had kept his promise. He never forgot one. His letters, although not frequent, were long and affectionate. Sometimes they enfolded a rose-bud; a fragrant leaf; a scrap of prose or verse he liked, and thought I would like also. Regularly, on my birthday, and at Christmas-time, came simple, well-chosen gifts, accompanied by his card. This was briefly the

story of our intimacy. To him, an incident. To me, a history.

These truths were far from my imagination as I sat in the arbor, four years after our parting. I had no bosom-friend of my own age and sex. The Mother had been my companion and confidante in all things whereof I could speak to any one. Gossip of beaux and love-scrapes was an unknown tongue to me. From my ignorant simplicity, allusions to these as personal concerns glanced off, unnoticed and unremembered. But reading and nature had, ere this, helped me to the knowledge that the feeling I had for Carl Cromer was unlike my love for my brothers. The unthinking worship of the child was among the things I had put away. The limpid, leaping runlet had deepened into the quieter stream that yet could not be stayed by woman's will. I said to myself—sitting, solitary and excited, on the one low step from which we had together watched many a sunset and moonrise—that I would face the truth bravely and without shame in that which should cause no shame. I could never love any other man as I did this one. I hoped he would, in time, learn to love me as well. I was confident in my ability to make him happy, and that I would be no drawback to him. I was not handsome or brilliant, but I was well-educated, fond of such studies as interested him, with a knowledge of his character and tastes such as few women could have opportunity for acquiring, and whatever of energy and talent I had, should be devoted to him and the advancement of his interests. If God

vouchsafed to fill my heart and existence with this abundant happiness, I would serve Him gratefully and faithfully, for evermore. And I had faith to believe that He would do this. It must be in consonance with His holy will. I asked nothing amiss, and I asked unwaveringly, when I prayed that He who had no pleasure in His children's grief, who knew their needs and pitied them in their failures and disappointments, would put my hand in that of His servant and let us continue and finish our earthly pilgrimage in company. We would work for Him the more earnestly, thus united; setting His glory steadfastly before us as the chief end of the lives He had blessed with this great joy; would acknowledge Him in all our ways; stand the nearer the Throne at the last because He had granted us the desire of our hearts and we had recognized in this human affection the type of His infinite Love.

Thus said woman's logic! I cannot smile—I could more easily weep in remembering how simple, how sincere, how sinless was my reasoning.

An apple from the tree overhead dropped, with a sudden thud, on the roof of the summer-house and rebounded to my feet. I stooped to catch it, as it rolled away; continued my musings, while tossing it from hand to hand. It should not have parted from the limb until late Autumn, yet this mid-August day saw its fall. The blossom cradling the germ had been perfect and sweet as its fellows, the bough bearing it had been visited as generously by sunshine, dew, and rain. The fruit was fair to see; rounded and firm, with an

incipient flush on the sunward side that should have betokened early ripening. But when I had toyed idly with it for awhile, examined it as idly, I threw it carelessly along the inclined plane of the gravel walk, watched it without regret, until it lost itself among the grey blooms of the lavender-bed.

Near the blossom-end of the fruit was a tiny puncture, such as one might make with a needle. A worm had eaten its way through this, out from the heart! That was all!





CHAPTER XV.

ONLY EIGHTEEN.



F we *could* refurnish that room, Mother ! ”
“ If we could afford it, May, I would do it gladly. But we cannot. I regret it as much as you can. We must content ourselves with making it clean and comfortable.”

There was nothing more to be said, although the Mother's light sigh in closing her sentence did not escape my ear. She lived the simplest and purest “life of trust” I have ever known of, but she believed and held for certain that we had no right to throw ourselves down headlong from pinnacles of temptation in order to prove the angels' guardianship. She regulated family and personal expenses wisely and prudently. I understood but partially then, that it was a trial which lost none of its severity in the thousandth repetition, to say “No” to her generous nature as well as to our requests for things which were common comforts in the estimation of most of our associates, for which we pleaded as untasted, but none the less coveted luxuries.

Two of her boys were now in college. All three were great, growing, healthy lads, who were "hard" upon clothes and provisions. We still rented the old homestead from Mrs. Fortescue, who would not, however, allow one cent for repairs to building or furniture.

The Mother never desponded. She was in the Father's hands. He knew, although she did not, how to combine her best good and truest happiness with His glory. She could not pray for one without including the others. There were no blunders and no waste in His economy.

In those days, people did not talk of "the Higher Life," except of that which would not come until the soul had shaken itself free of the body. I am by no means positive, that, after much reading and hearing on the subject, I understand, as yet, what is now comprehended in the term, as usually employed. But, if by it is meant, a life hid with Christ in God; unconditional reliance upon the promise that grace and strength and succor shall come with the day of need;—a walk, calm, devout, and loving,—the child's hand nestled securely in that of the Father; clinging always, but more earnestly and fondly at the approach of danger; if it signify an intelligent faith (and faith may be intelligent, yet implicit), that is never moved from its moorings by gale or undertow, finding in "Thus saith the Lord," answer sufficient and sublime to cavil and question and bitter blast of persecution;—then did the Mother, without suspecting her eminence, move in that "higher sphere," and was set apart from her fellow-

Christians by the "new consecration" of which we now hear so much from those who claim to have gained, and forever to stand upon the mountain-top, seen from which heaven is all and earth is nothing.

The Mother's was what I call every-day religion. If she had stated and invariable times for prayer, we did not know it. That she went to her closet with the eager delight of the betrothed to the tryst, we soon learned. That she prayed without ceasing we discovered while we were yet babies at her knee; that He whom we were apt to feel we had dismissed—courteously and becomingly, indeed, yet whom we were done with for a season, when we arose from family prayers at morning and evening,—abode continually at her right hand, at her down-sitting and her uprising, her going out and her coming in. If the ever-light purse were lean to emptiness; the handful of meal were shrunken to a few poor scrapings; if the inverted cruse yielded its few drops laggingly, she asked for more, as Mark held up his plate to her when it was empty. For all this, she took care of money, meal, and oil while they lasted.

"God works by means," was one of her sayings. "But He seldom employs such unworthy instruments as our prodigality, presumption, or indolence to accomplish our good."

Nor do I believe that she was much given to what many "advanced Christians"—both teachers and preachers—strenuously recommend as "the duty of self-examination."

I wish I could say without danger of misconstruction, something of what I think and feel—what I have felt for long, striving, perplexed years, on this subject. I should not dare open my lips upon the matter, were it not that the memory of the Mother's living, active, *steady* faith emboldens me.

To my way of thinking, there is no more unhappy class of really good people than those who are most given to what they have bound upon their consciences as the duty of rigid and frequent introspection. Their cry—"My leanness! my leanness!" their piteous enumeration of "wounds and bruises and putrefying sores," are not prayers, although they think they are. Can you suppose that the prodigal after he had cast himself as "no more worthy to be called thy son;"—as wholly filthy and abominable, and broken-hearted because of that filthiness, at his father's feet, felt it incumbent upon him to make daily and hourly examination into the quality and measure of the love that warmed and moved his whole being whenever he met that reconciled father's eye, or sat at meat with him, no longer an outcast but a child?

What shall we say of the wife who, living joyfully with the husband of her choice, leaning on his arm in her walks, sleeping in his bosom, finding her chief earthly pleasure in doing the things that make for his good and comfort, should esteem it her bounden duty to creep formally and stately into his presence, to assure him of her allegiance; to lay to every heart-throb—every yearning to cast herself into his arms and cry

—"My beloved! in whom my soul delighteth," the plummet and line that may convince her conscience, by actual measurement and indubitable figures, how much she loves him?

The monks of old—Trappist and Dominican—enjoined and practised self-examination to the utmost degree of human endurance. I do not wonder that the blood-stiffened thong sometimes cut their terrified souls out of their bodies, in the horrible energy of their remorse for past and present sin.

Oh! we need very few words in which to tell our human Saviour of our unworthiness to receive the least of His gracious favors! When we have tottered with the sore and foul things we call our hearts to the Cross, shall we not leave them there? trust to the healing drops that distil from His riven side to cleanse them? Having owned to Him that the festering wounds are cankering the base burdens to the core, why plunge, at set days and hours, our unskilful fingers into their rottenness?

"LORD! we are nothing, and less than nothing! Thou art all, and in all!"

And having thus sobbed our wretchedness in ourselves, our hope in His mercy, into His pitying ears, let us be comforted; quit us as free men, and not as slaves. For the rest—our temptations, our doubts, our backsliding—God knows!

I have wandered a long way, apparently, from the starting-point of this chapter, namely, the discussion as to the refurnishing of the corner front room in the

second story, formerly occupied by Ronald and Carl, and which the latter had sent to re-engage. I went up to review the situation of it, now, hopeless of new furniture though I was. It was a shabby place. I had known this before, but it was trebly dingy in the light of that "we cannot afford it." The twice turned carpet, the old-fashioned four-poster, spindle-shanked and curtainless: the maple-wood bureau and inky table; the windows with their faded shades, always tawdry in their "Italian scenes," where the grass was blue-green, the water and sky indigo, and flowers as big as cabbages, grew upon dauntless bushes less than a foot high: where every woman carried a guitar, and every man a rapier and a scarlet cloak flung over his shoulder, with the sun blazing hot in the zenith—how mean and hideous it all was! Little by little, we had, so far as our slender means would allow, made headway against Mrs. Fortescue's taste, but the consumptive purse was an ever recurring stumbling-block. I sat me down in one of the Windsor chairs—there were four of them, and much the worse for students' wear and tear in the last three terms—and made a disconsolate calculation. I wouldn't mind turning the carpet once more. The shabbiest breadths—if I could decide which they were—might go under the bed, for which the Mother would provide a white counterpane and valance. But these alterations would do little towards cloaking the forlorn homeliness of the dormitory, so unfit for the residence of him whom we expected.

"If I were only rich!"

The sigh was pressed from me by real pain. Poverty is never so truly a curse as when it cripples our efforts for others' welfare. Bare floors and windows in my own chamber would not have damped my spirits for a second, although I had a native liking for comfortable prettinesses of all kinds. My soul revolted at the thought of forcing Carl into contact with aught mean or ignoble. I would have hung the walls with silk, and strewed the carpet knee-deep in rose leaves for him, if I could.

"But I am so poor! so poor!" I said, two babyish tears rolling down my face.

Then I thought hard, and more as a woman should, for full twenty minutes. I was not penniless; I had four dollars locked up in my desk, destined, I had supposed, for the purchase of materials for my winter cap. I had determined suddenly upon another disposition of the hoard. I tied my head in a handkerchief, called up Felix and Albert, and attacked the carpet out of hand. The time was short, and I had decreed that the corner-room should undergo a complete change before the new Professor made his address to faculty and students on opening day—just a week off. The boys helped me willingly; beat the carpet on the green sward under the King apple-tree, and engaged to put it down when I was ready to have it done. The sons of poor clergymen early become adepts in domestic toils and shifts. I ripped open the disreputable floor-covering at every seam, and sewed it together again, turning and twisting it until it must have lost its own identity beyond recall, and finished it before night

I surrendered the next day to cleaning, even whitewashing the walls myself. Then I went down town and bought a whole piece of cross-barred muslin. It was coarse and "out of style," but it was sheer and white, and I got it at a bargain for my four dollars. Felix made a rude tester for the bedstead, and cornices for the window. My curtains were long and full, and to loop them, I cut into narrow ribbons the blue sash I had worn on last Commencement Day.

It was a busy week throughout the house, and I could only devote odd hours to my labor of love. Making a little mystery of my enterprise, I easily won the Mother's smiling promise not to enter the corner dormitory until I gave her leave. Work as I might, however, the important day dawned and found me unready. Another sacrifice, and one I acknowledged as such, must be made. I could not accompany the boys to the college-chapel to hear the public inaugural of the Professor-elect. Felix protested loudly against my decision; the Mother mildly expostulated; Albert "feared Mr. Cromer might feel hurt at my absence." I shook my head at one and all, and ran away lest they might perceive my regret and redouble their entreaties. It would have been a sorer trial to have Carl take possession of his home-quarters before they were made home-like.

How I wrought that September morning! sitting on the floor in my calico kitchen wrapper, my hair pushed behind my ears; the mellow chime of the college-bell, the rush and tramp of many feet under my open win-

dows telling me when the young Professor, who was to arrive in the ten o'clock train, would stand as a master where he had once, and, not long ago, sat as a learner. The air was balmily delicious; the ivy rustled and whistled in the pleasant wind; the swallows whirred and chattered under the eaves of the hip-roofed old house. The sun-light lay on the carpet—much of the time, across my lap—all the forenoon. I was busily, yet dreamily happy. I have long maintained that men lose the bouquet of the wine of welcome that rightly belongs to the entertainer, whose is the greater blessing of giving, in that the ministering to the guest's comfort and enjoyment, in material things, must be so largely committed to the women of the house. I pity those mistresses who have never known for themselves the fascinating intentness of hospitable thoughts. This is the poetry of receiving and feasting one's friends; the magic that makes the homeliest duty elegant; the sweeping of a stair, the wiping of a dish, a graceful heart-offering to the sojourner beneath our roof-tree. I remembered with joy unfeigned, while my fingers flew over my work, the smooth snowiness of the creams I had whipped for dessert; that the peaches which were to bear these company were large and luscious, steeped to their red hearts in Summer sunshine; that the golden-brown pears were fragrant as the flowers that garnished the china dish in which they were heaped. Presently, when I had set the last stitch, I would run down to the garden for certain carnations, day-lilies, and lush Luxembourg roses, I had mentally

elected to the honor of filling the vase I had borrowed from the parlor to adorn the bureau. It would not be now incongruous, that I had hemmed a white cover for the battered top, and hidden the clumsy frame of the mirror by muslin drapery.

In my happy foolishness, I chanted to music of my own making :

“I went down into the garden to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished and the pomegranates budded.

“The mandrakes give a smell, and, at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my Beloved !”

Be patient with me, reader ! I was only eighteen.

Set in a halo, like a silver frame, is that picture of the unworldly, loving girl, for me, as I glance back from the grey, prosaic heights of middle-age. I thank God that it was once Myself.

I had but fifteen minutes for my dinner-toilette, when the Mother had passed judgment upon my finished work. I recollect particularly well how she commended that which I had stayed away from chapel, that day to complete—a rug made of grey frieze, thick as a board, which I had stumbled upon in the garret. I had bound it with blue, braided an arabesque in the same color in each corner, and in the centre, the initials “C. C.,” intertwined with flourishes.

“What a famous housekeeper my May will make,” said the wisest and dearest of women, while I stood by, flushed and ecstatic, my fingers raw and blue from

handling the rough cloth and braid. "But, my love, I would have allowed you more time for this, had I guessed at the magnitude of your undertaking."

"I wouldn't have had it, otherwise!" I cried, eagerly; "it seems more suitable—I would say—"

My tongue could not phrase what I felt—that self-denial becomes rest when the service is done for Love's sake.

I was just dressed when I heard the boys all talking together, in the lower hall, and hurried to join them, my heart beating as it had never throbbed before.

"Professor Cromer will be here presently!" burst forth Felix, at sight of me. "He was fallen upon, overwhelmed, swept away by an avalanche at the chapel door! In what shape, do you think? In that of Old Wagner, from Wyanoake, fussier and more pompous than ever!"

"Indeed. Was Mrs. Wagner with him?"

"No, but his daughters were—" began the quieter Albert.

Felix broke in, unscrupulously: "Stunners! both of them! No end of furbelows and graces. Prettyish, though, for their father's daughters!"

"You didn't speak to them, I hope?" was my not very Christian query.

"What do you take us for? The Mother would have done so, I suppose, being one of the 'bless-your-persecutor kind,'" rushed on the lawless youth, when a remembered voice behind us, said, playfully, but with

the slightest conceivable touch of reproach in the friendly intonations :

“Isn’t that the best ‘kind,’ my man ?”

It was Carl.





CHAPTER XVI.

ROSE-COLOR.

RONALD was with his friend. They had come to Old Harbor in the same train, and gone directly, and together to the College Chapel. Both were in excellent spirits, happy in each other's society, and in the circumstances of Carl's return to his former home.

While he talked with the Mother, and to the boys, who stood about him, in a sort of shy rapture at his presence, tempered and flavored with an abiding sense of his new honors, Ronald drew me a little aside and put a square, flat parcel into my hand.

"To be worn in honor of the day!" he whispered. "That is—if you like it."

At the first opportunity, I sped away to my room to examine the gift. Within a thin pasteboard box lay folded a wide sash ribbon, and a narrower for the neck, of pale rose-color, almost as delicate as peach-blossom. A bit of paper on top told me they were for "May. From her loving brother R——."

He often pleased himself by doing such things now that he was making his own way in the world. I slid my fingers under the rich glossy folds—the very luxury of touch—while the pure, clear bloom caressed the eye.

“If I like them!” said I, smiling at the useless proviso, while my eyes were warm and moist. “They are only too beautiful for me. Shall I look overdressed, I wonder?”

My candid judgment said, “No,” and approved the effect, when I had tied the sash about my waist, and knotted the cravat at my throat. My dress was a simple lawn, the pattern, lilies of the valley dropped upon a white ground. Ronald’s present brightened up my apparel and my face; smoothed out certain tired lines of whose existence I had been painfully conscious even while I would look as happy as I felt. There is comfort—real, rational, and thorough—in looking well. It should always be easy for those who are beautiful by nature to be comely in others’ eyes. I, who at my best, was merely pretty, and that when I presented a three-quarter face to the observer, rejoiced now in my seemliness; and, in consequence thereof, grew momentarily more fair while surveying my image in the mirror, and thinking pleasant things of my brother’s goodness. My cup was very full of sweetness and sparkle that day. I went downstairs with a buoyant step, to be further blessed by the light, lingering stroke of the Mother’s hand upon my shoulder, and her smile of sympathy with my pleasure.

"Wasn't it like Ronald, Mamma?" I asked, as we were laying tiny bouquets upon each napkin. "He has inimitable tact and grace."

Her answer stilled my restless tongue in deeper delight.

"His sister deserves all he can do for her—and more!"

She was always liberal of praise to me. Perhaps, she foresaw that society was likely to be more niggardly to me in this respect than to most women. Perhaps, I loved commendation so dearly and showed this so plainly that she had not the heart to withhold it. In either case, she was sincere and hearty in awarding it.

We had a long table-full at dinner, and the party was a merry one. I had never done Carl the passing injustice of imagining that he would be otherwise than genial and kind in his association with the students to whom he was now, one set in authority. But I was agreeably surprised at his dignified yet winning bearing toward even the least attractive of the Freshmen who sat at the same board with him. That they would never fear or dislike him was quite certain. It was equally as certain that they would never know for him a shade of the contempt which is the offspring of untimely familiarity. The President of the college—the Mother's friendly and near neighbor—was a self-invited guest to what Felix called, "our inaugural banquet." A couple of very portentous D.D.'s and an Honorable who was a Trustee of the same institution—

(I recollect he spoke of it as an "Institootion,")—further dignified the assembly. The Mother was always the collected and graceful hostess, dispensing the simplest food that spread our table, in our most struggling days with well-bred and hospitable courtesy that prevented one from thinking it mean or coarse. She could offer her family and guests generous fare at this date, savory and well-served. So much better served and tastefully garnished than is generally found on richer people's boards than Old Harbor busy-bodies "could not understand how she could afford to set such a table," and the young men who obtained a place in her household were accounted lucky indeed. The inaugural dinner did her credit. How we had enjoyed getting it up! and how many subtle, and, except to the initiated, concealed compliments to the new Professor were embodied in the various dishes—not one of his favorites that was seasonable being omitted, is a theme upon which I should like to dwell—the poetry and sentiment of housewifery being a hobby with me.

"A Carl-ist spread!" said Felix, under his breath to me, when the dessert was brought on. Carl, in his seat at the Mother's right hand, did not hear this "aside," but a flash of his eyes at me, sportive and grateful, and a little bow testified his recognition of the tribute to his remembered tastes and his appreciation of the share I had had in the offering. I had not the opportunity of exchanging a word with him while we were at dinner. I sat next but one to Ronald, who

filled the place of host as his mother's vis-à-vis, and nimble as my tongue was wont to be when my companions were few and all friends, I never was a table-talker. I had almost cured myself of coloring furiously, and stammering, if directly accosted on occasions like the present, but I was ever pleased to be left to my own thoughts and the free use of my own eyes and ears in any social crowd, large or small. Left thus in liberty and quiet, I could enjoy the ease and address with which Ronald introduced and helped sustain topics that interested all. If one of the D.D.'s was disposed to be verbose and the other sharp, and if the wisdom of the Honorable on literary and scientific topics was less apparent to his listeners than to himself; if the Freshmen were alternately pert and sheepish, and the members of higher classes blatant in their attempts to put these down, my brother, without a symptom of arrogance or self-assertion, contrived to neutralize offensive elements and give pre-eminence to whatever interested and pleased the majority of the company.

He was growing fast, intellectually and in popular favor. No need now of encouraging predictions from far-sighted wiseacres to the effect that he "would make his mark in the world." He bore in mien, feature and language—in the nameless air of self-reliance and commanding will—the stamp of the successful man as his father had the reverse inscription. I fell into a reverie while the gentlemen sipped the coffee that followed the dessert, and the talk grew

more lively. Wine was unknown upon our bills of fare, but nobody noticed it who quaffed the Mother's coffee, strong, clear, and hot, and for those who liked such qualification of the beverage, mantled with whipped cream, melting slowly at the spoon's persuasion, and mingling mild richness with the aromatic potency of the cup. The light entered the dining-room from the end windows. Those on the side were shaded to avoid the glare of cross-lights. There was a continuous glitter all along the length of the board from the double line of glass and china, with flashes from silver spoons and forks. Not solid silver and cut-glass, all of it, but that one was apt to overlook at the Mother's table. Dishes of fruit and vases of flowers supplied the dashes of vivid color needful where cloth and china were white, and banqueters were, with two exceptions, gentlemen attired in solemn black. The air was heavy with fragrance and the well-modulated voices, the cultivated intonations of the chief speakers added to the delicious sense of luxury that steeped my being.

I remembered, still in my reverie, how I had once lifted a butterfly from the damp grass in the shade of the lilac hedge where he had fallen, on creeping from the chrysalis-shell, and laid him numb and shivering, in the very heart of a damask rose, full-blown and sun-warmed. How I had watched the waves of comfort spread through his little body, in successive thrills that finally became paroxysms of sensuous ecstasy. How the brown and gold and scarlet velvet

of wings and back brightened into lustre until he was as royal and free a thing as the queen-flower that had brought him to life. How sure I felt in studying the transformation, that his oblivion of the wet, dark shell he had lately quitted was complete by the time he swam away, upborne, it seemed, rather by the sunshine than the breeze.

This—the scene in which I found myself to-day—was the fulfilment of the fragmentary yet gorgeous visions of my childish days: at least, a glimpse of the Enchanted Land that must—or Hope and Faith and Love were liars—outlie the slough, the precipice, and the begloomed valley.

Between two tall bouquets I could see Carl's face—more spirituel, yet more manly than it was when we had parted,—far handsomer than the picture I kept in the locked drawer upstairs beside my mother's miniature. The hero of the feast I named him to myself. And he was; but to none of those whose deferential attention to what he said and complimentary mention of his inaugural made my pulses flutter as with personal vanity,—to none of the learned and unlearned men there present was he the hero and kingly marvel he was to me. I did not guess this then, or how 'absurd they one and all would have esteemed my soberest reflection had I dreamed aloud. I am glad I did not. The butterfly had his hour. This was mine.

I stated the sum of my thoughts in very practical phrase to the Mother, as she washed and I wiped the silver and glass after dinner. The gentlemen had gone

to the garden. Through the windows I saw them sitting under the trees or strolling along the walks, busy with post-prandial cigars and discussions. The largest group was gathered on the benches under the King apple-tree, and had Carl for its centre—still the ruling spirit of the hour.

"Our entertainment has been a decided success," I said, complacently. "How beautifully everything has gone off!"

"We have indeed had a very delightful day," assented the Mother. "I hope—I believe our guests have enjoyed it. It is a white day in our family calendar, that gives us Carl again."

"I have been thinking, Mamma," said I, with an important air that must have diverted her, although she did not betray it, "that we may fairly and without presumption, consider the tribulations of the Heddens at an end. All the indications are, that the tide has turned for us. I could think of nothing all dinner-time but the change in our circumstances. It did me good to see how respectfully every one spoke to and of Ronald; and he bears his honors as if born to the purple. He will be a master among men as surely as you are a queen among women."

She checked me with a smile that trembled slightly.

"Little flatterer! But I know it is love—not judgment—that is speaking. Only, darling, don't talk about the turn of the tide. There is no ebb in the tide of the Father's mercy and truth towards His own. Paul was not talking for effect when he said that he

gloried in tribulation. It is the precious seed from which the glorious hope, that knows no shame or change, arises. I am a proud and a happy woman that He has spared my noble sons and this dear daughter to be the crown and staff of my old age. But I would not forget that He loved me as truly when He took my baby-girls and Harry from my bosom, and hid them from my sight for all time."

I was dissatisfied. Her talk was oftener an unknown tongue to me now, than when I lay, a fearsome child, in her arms, and believed her as she sang,—

"Every pain and every sorrow
Bring His own to Him more near."

Out of the rash conceit of girlhood I answered her: "But with a different sort of love! With the love a parent feels when he lifts up a violent hand against his child, in punishment for his fault. The child cannot feel that he is as dear to his father as when he is smiled upon and petted; looks upon even righteous anger as an evidence of diminished affection."

"God is *never* angry with His children, dear!" She spoke in earnest haste, as if to ward off a horrible suggestion. "Never believe *that*, for an instant! The thought dishonors His infinite pity and tenderness—detracts from the sufficiency of our Saviour's atonement. The arrows of Divine wrath were quenched in His blood. My heart would have broken long ago, had I not been able to cling, through tears and trembling, to this sure persausion—that His most grievous chas-

tening was for my 'profit.' Good old Rutherford expressed this well when he wrote to an afflicted friend, 'Be sure the Lord must care much for the welfare of your soul, or He would not give you so much medicine.'"

"But medicine is disagreeable," I urged. "And why, since He is all-powerful, does He allow us to fall into a diseased state in the first place? He might as easily keep us well. Don't look so grieved, dear Mamma! I do not mean to be captious or irreverent, but my eyes are not so strong and keen as yours, to see the end from the beginning. And the intermediate stages are often dark and rough."

She received my petulant protest as patiently and sweetly as she did the apology.

"I do *not* see yet,—I shall never see, in this world,—why so many of my pleasant places have been laid waste; but I shall be all the more astonished and delighted when in His presence my eyes are unsealed, and I shall know as I am known. I lay awake for a long time last night, overwhelmed by even the vague glimpse of the good which shall be born to me—I have His word for it—out of the great and sore travail of my griefs. I shall remember no more the anguish or the blindness. It is worth waiting for, girlie!"

Looking at her face, I could not doubt that she believed and felt all she said, and more; was ashamed to confess that my younger spirit—of a temper less fine, and comparatively untried—girded at the thought of chastisement, even though I were persuaded that it was

for my profit. The pleasure of the day is so much at eighteen—the present brightness so full of warmth and dazzle that one spurns, with impatient incredulity, the thought of the possible cloud of to-morrow. I was secretly obstinate in the belief that good fortune fostered healthy spiritual growth. If it was reasonable and natural to love earthly benefactors in proportion to the number and value of their benefits, should not the tide of grateful affection to the Great Giver rise proportionably with the continuous outpour of His mercies? There might be some exceptional souls, I granted in my mental argument, to whom unbroken prosperity meant aridness and hardness; upon whom the days of cloud and storm acted as the rain from heaven upon the bulbs buried beneath desert sands,—bringing out greenness and bloom as by the miracle of a new creation. I thanked God that it was not thus with me; that the spiritual and mental stature of womanhood had come to me through the glory of the sunlight.

Nothing was wanting to my happiness that day. The hours were banded into a circlet of gems, and the clasp was added when the fair September day was gliding into twilight as fragrant and delicious as had been the noon. The guests had dispersed; the student-boarders were scattered hither and thither in the town. The Mother was in her own room; and in all the garden, where golden dusks were gathering under tree and hedge and harbor, and the flowers falling asleep peacefully upon their stalks, but for the visits of the

big dragon-moths who blundered heavily up and down the alleys, droning their evening song—only two human figures were to be seen pacing the familiar precincts, arm-in-arm. Fairly tired out at last in body, but with brain and heart wide awake, I made for myself a lazy nook among the pillows of the lounge in the sitting-room, and watched the pair of friends from between the muslin curtains.

They were of nearly the same height, but the willowy slenderness of Carl's figure was more apparent by contrast with Ronald's well-knit limbs, broad chest, and soldierly bearing. The enforced toils and frugal fare of the Wyanoake parsonage had made an athlete of our eldest boy. His superb physical health and sanguine temperament spoke in his tread; his gestures, and the resonant tones, that in the hush of twilight brought whole and half-sentences of his speech to my ear, when I could only hear the indistinct murmur of Carl's voice. They mounted the terrace under my window, by and by; paused directly in front of it to survey the landscape; the drowsy old town, where lights were beginning to blink, still drowsily, in the windows; the river on which lay the faint trail of departing day, and the black ramparts of thither hills.

"Not beautiful! still less is it grand," said Carl. "Yet I ask no more blessed earthly lot than to spend the rest of my days here. I am not ambitious, Ron. I could divide my life most happily between the lecture-room and 'mine ain fireside.' Not a lonely fireside!

I have had my dreams, like other men, of the presence that may—”

They moved on. I, poor, foolish flutterer! was sitting upright, hot thrills going through me to my very finger-tips; my head in a whirl; aware that I ought to get myself out of hearing, or make known my presence, yet literally unable to stand or walk. At the end of the terrace, they turned, and words were again audible. Carl was still the speaker.

“You must come up presently, and see my room. It is fresh and fair as her own sweet fancies. The Mother says that I was to have been kept in ignorance as to whose hands had made it ready for my coming,” with a little laugh at once amused and fond. “As if I did not know all about it, the moment I opened the door!”

They had stopped again, now so near the window, that Ronald could have touched the curtain with his hand.

“May is a veritable home-fairy!” he said. “A dear, good girl, as I have reason to know.”

“She must ever be to me the dearest child in the world! Heaven bless her!”

As the words passed Carl’s lips in the slow, peculiarly distinct intonations that characterized his speech, he lifted his hat with a motion of loving reverence.

“Maysie!” called Ronald, it may have been five minutes afterwards, from the foot of the stairs. “Where are you hiding yourself?”

I did not answer or come down. Locked in my

little room, I was kneeling by my bed thanking God through a summer rain of sweet tears, that He loved me well enough to bestow upon me such great and incredible happiness.





CHAPTER XVII.

A GOLDEN DAY.



YOU can't make a head and brains out of a brass knob with nothing in it!" quoted I, from that delightfully absurd creation, 'Mr. F's Aunt.'

The Mother looked up, astonished, from her house-keeping books.

"*What* did you say, my love?"

"I am only sounding the signal of defeat, Motherdie! I hoped against hope that my bonnet might be presentable, and I was mistaken. That is all. Decency is now my only aim."

She pushed aside her work, and examined the scraps of napless velvet, the frayed feathers and ironed-out ribbons in my lap, more and more doubtfully, as she laid one after another aside.

"Never mind!" I exclaimed, distressed at her look of pain and sympathy. "Maybe it is only a wholesome mortification of my vanity!"

"Mortification of harmless desires is heathenish—not Christian," she rejoined. "I wish I could play *Percioso* to this heap of tumbled finery. But I am

afraid most of it has served its term, even in your wonder-working hands."

"I must have some sort of head-gear to wear to the city, to-morrow," said I, in calm desperation. "My Summer straw is really past worthy."

I selected the least disreputable bits of black velvet, and began to cover the bonnet-frame I had bought that afternoon. The morrow would be my nineteenth birthday, and Carl had proposed to give me an "outing."

"That was the name for it in my grandmother's day," he said. "As the French would say:—I crave the pleasure of making one little *fête* for Mademoiselle, on her birth-day. It will be Saturday, and we will take the nine o'clock train to the city, attend the grand musical *matinée* at two, and be home again by supper time. You will sanction our 'lark,' will you not, Mrs. Hedden? It is such a decorous one! And May has been a very good girl, all the year!"

She could not resist his pleadings; the whimsical boyishness of manner and phraseology. I knew she was glad to grant me the holiday treat, and how entire was her confidence in his ability and intention to take care of me; was not surprised that she watched me, musingly and pityingly. She felt for me in the minute, as well as grievous trials incident to our straitened means; never attempted to convince me against reason and experience that it was weak and unworthy of a rational being to feel these even as pinpricks, from which I could not writhe myself free. It *hurt* her to see me shabby, almost as much as it would have done to

have me go hungry. She appreciated and did honor to the love of the beautiful, struggling within me for expression, let it be never so imperfect. But, to-night, I fancied that I detected a new meaning in her regards; discerned a stealing shadow, far down in her eyes; a grave intentness that was almost sadness.

"Mamma," I asked, struck by a sudden thought, "do you disapprove, in the least, of my going? What are you thinking of?"

"I am very grateful to Mr. Cromer for his desire and effort to make your birth-day pass happily," she answered. "If I seem serious, it is with the earnestness of my longing to secure your welfare, now and always, my darling!"

She put her arms about me in a strain that told of love, regret—and something I could not interpret, more powerful than either, and left me without another word. In a short time she returned, with a parcel in her hand, her features restored to their accustomed placidity.

"I bought new black strings for my bonnet, last week, but have not put them on," she said cheerfully. "I can get others, when I need them. You can take these. And this black lace veil, although older than yourself, is still handsome, and resembles in shape and size those which are now worn."

"Mamma, your coat-of-arms should be an eider duck, stripping her own breast that her young may lie the warmer!" I said, to hide deeper feeling.

"It is very little I can do for you, my child. I am just beginning to find out how little!"

I heard her sigh to herself in saying it.

The bonnet was finished before I went to bed. It was not stylish. No one could have mistaken it for new. But it became me when I tied it on, next morning, before the little glass over my toilet-table. "Became me." Did you ever get into the inner meaning of the phrase? the sense of entire fitness, belongingness, identity? The modest bonnet then looked as if it had always been mine; lent kindly shadows (for bonnets had rims then) to the young, eager eyes; framed fitly with the quilled lining of blue, the rounded cheeks; caught and held in place a curl that seemed to have broken loose from the mass put away behind my ears, to ripple across, almost to hide, the red mark low down on the left side of my face. The Mother fastened on the veil so as to conceal certain irredeemably bare spots on the velvet; puffed out the ribbon bows under my chin; kissed me once—twice—and committed me to Professor Cromer's care. All three of the boys escorted us to the dépôt; waved their hats and hurrahed when the train started. My visit to the metropolis was an event to them, as to me. Although distant from it only an hour and a half by rail and ferry, we were too poor, in our household, to indulge in its pleasures; too busy to frequent its popular marts. The weather was clear and very cold. Not piercing with winds nor numbing with dampness, but generous of oxygen and sunshine, sending the blood in such exultant leaps through veins and arteries, that

there seemed to be real warmth in the crisp kisses of the air.

"Five degrees above zero!" said Carl, as we stepped on the platform of an up-town car.

"Impossible!" I protested. "The day is perfect, delicious, exhilarating, like new wine!"

"Iced?" laughed he, as I loved to have him applaud or sportively ridicule my girlish extravagancies of speech. "Are you quite warm? Do you feel the wind from the door? Don't forget that I carry this extra shawl for you."

I was snugly squeezed in my seat between a thin dowager in velvet, and a fat washerwoman in a blanket shawl and worsted hood. Carl stood in the aisle, one hand in a leathern loop pendant from the roof. He had to bend slightly, being so tall, and thus bending, brought my face within easy eye-range. Again and again my upward glance met his downward, watchful and benignant. The consciousness of his guardianship enwrapped me, as ermine robes might warm and delight the body. It was my nineteenth birth-day—this is my *fête*, and Carl's gift. So, in the restaurant where we lunched, I was altogether at my ease. The waiters were models of dexterity and courtesy; the marble hall, with its gaudy frescoes, and tinkling chandeliers, and mirrored perspective of endless lines of white tables gleaming with silver and glass, and a bewildering succession of gliding forms, were like scenes I had beheld in dreams—like nothing my waking eyes had ever gloated upon. I did not be-

tray my unsophisticated ecstasy. The sight of the dear, familiar face opposite me, the sound of his lively tones kept me at home with him and with myself. The day and the scene were ours. We abode upon an enchanted island, the tossing waves, gleaming with a thousand prismatic hues, swept past us on their hurrying way, and touched us not by so much as a dash of spray.

"I have an errand at a book-store on the next block," said Carl, when the fairy-feast was over. "May I leave you here for ten minutes? You will be safe and comfortable. Amuse yourself with this newspaper. Are you sure you are not afraid?"

"Of what?" laughed I. "Don't hurry back! I shall enjoy looking on, a while longer."

The elegant waiter cleared away the remains of our banquet; brought me a second paper, and departed, leaving me to the full enjoyment of the seclusion—so many degrees removed from loneliness—one feels in the heart of a crowd of strangers. The saloon was filling up rapidly. Superbly-dressed matrons sailing in fleets; dashing young ladies; flaunting school-girls in holiday apparel; grey-headed and bald men, anxious of mien, and ponderous in style and weight; dapper clerks, importunate of waiters—these were some of the bubbles on the tinted billows—until the stream seemed to pause abruptly, to sink in still indistinctness. A man at the table next mine was surveying me through a gold eye-glass, not impertinently exactly, but with an air of genuine interest and cool inquiry that annihili-

lated self-command and put self-respect to flight. I knew him, at once. It was the "Frenchman" whom we had left standing without our door, card in hand, on the mid-July day when we had rushed into a more august and awful Presence. He looked very little older now, than then. His hair was brushed further forward over the temples, and the bald place between the solicitous locks showed more plainly. The network of wrinkles was wider and closer about mouth and eyes; his skin was a trifle more sallow. He wore a surtout with collar and breast-facings and cuffs of fur that reminded me of the portraits of the "first gentleman in Europe"—George IV., as Prince and King.

But no memory of the little girl he had seen for a moment, six years ago, could linger in his aristocratic bosom; kindle the determined curiosity I read in his black eyes. I tried not to see him, but the blood arose obstinately to my cheeks and brain. There was a roaring and hissing in my ears; my very finger-tips throbbed with the painful pressure. I might have changed my position; turned my back upon him; taken refuge in the dressing-room; but I thought of none of these things, only sat still, spell-bound by the glittering eyes and dreadful eye-glass, enduring a torment of bashfulness, and crying inwardly, "Will Carl never come?"

"Are you tired waiting?" said he, gayly, at last, close beside me, although I had not seen him enter. "What is the matter?"

For, I was cowering over my paper, my left hand

pressed tightly to my marred cheek, blind and faint, the red heat having burned into pallor.

"It is so close here!" I stammered, rising hastily. "Do let us go! I shall be better in the open air."

I ventured a glimpse of my persecutor in passing his table. He was deep in consultation with an obsequious waiter over the *carte* of the day, the golden-mounted glass screwed fast to one eye. Had my ridiculous sensitiveness misled me? Had his scrutiny been brief and casual, and was my imagination responsible for my discomfort?

I was more than ready to believe this by the time we were seated in the spacious and beautiful Academy of Music; had forgotten the existence of the troublesome man before the overture was half over. How shall I write of the two hours that followed? "The players upon instruments," rising rank upon rank, from the footlights to the frescoed wall at the rear, arms and bodies swaying to the slow monotone, the shrieking gust, the swift whirlwind of the music—were a passing wonder to me. They were but the keys on which the Master played. They had as little share in working the charm that bowed, melted, bore away our souls upon a torrent of lofty and passionate enthusiasm, as have the tree-boughs on stormy nights, in awakening and directing the North-west gale, or the minor wail that creeps up from the sea to cry at our casements and sob, around red hearths, spent dirges for the brave ship and braver hearts that have gone down in mid-ocean.

I heard it all that golden day! The voices,—sad,

joyous, terrible in sublimity—of Nature, of which I had dreamed fitfully hitherto in poor snatches I blushed to remember. The sweeter, sadder, grander music of the heart, which I had also known in bits and broken bars, and echoes that died with the hearing. These, and a million mysteries more, as revealed to the rapt souls of prophets and seers of the divine art, and by them syllabled to us, trembling in delicious awe, yet in exceeding joy, at their feet! By and by, as I have said, I saw neither players nor instruments. Only the one calm, majestic figure in the foreground; the man who became the Master, so soon as having made his grave bow to the applauding throng, he stepped upon the low pedestal in front of the orchestra, and lifted his wand. At the wave of that hand, responsive to the vibration and sweep of his sceptre, the spirits of earth, air, and seas—of heaven—aye! and of hell—awoke and obeyed his will.

“It is good to be here,” whispered Carl, between the first and second parts of the concert.

I answered as reverently: “It reminds me of Papa and the amethyst sunset; of the twelve stones and the burning crystal sea, and the harpers harping with their harps. I can *feel* my soul grow!”

Presently he spoke again. His eyes were wells of lucid darkness; his lips were unbent in womanly tremor.

“Thank you!”

Well! The end came at last, as all earthly glory must pass away.

"But it will always go on in heaven," I uttered, involuntarily, as the Master's grave and gracious face was withdrawn from our sight.

"You believe, then, that in such language we shall speak and think, when all nations shall be of one tongue? So do I," replied Carl. "No wonder our imprisoned souls cry out in pain and yearning as we listen!"

We moved slowly with the crowd toward the door. We were still a dozen feet from it, when a slight figure, all blue velvet, and sheeny silk, and snowy furs, soft and dazzling as a gleam of Summer heavens between white clouds, confronted us, with a cry of joy:

"Mr. Cromer! who would have thought of seeing you here?"

She held out two small hands encased in delicate grey kid, and he had to take both; still held them in turning to me:

"May, have you forgotten your former play-fellow? This is Miss Rosa Wagner."

The pretty hand, smooth and plump as if "done" in grey marble, was laid engagingly in my palm. I tried not to see, and to hope that she would not, that my gloves were baggy with much wearing, and carefully mended at the finger-tips. I did feel, as any other woman would in the circumstances, that my hat was old, and pieced out, and home-made; that I was a country dowdy beside her elegance. Moreover, I had never liked either of the sisters, and detested the name of Wagner upon general principles of loyalty to Papa's

memory. But while Carl's tone and look besought, "Be civil, for my sake," I could not but be complaisant. We exchanged inquiries and replies touching the health and family of each, in the midst of which Rosa broke off with an enchanting blush :

"How thoughtless I am ! Walter !"

A young gentleman, just behind her, answered ; a fashionably dressed, mustachioed youth, with a *lorgnette* in his hand.

"Allow me to present my friend !" a slight but significant stress upon the pronoun, "Mr. Atlee—Miss Hedden—Professor Cromer. You must have heard me speak of Mr. Cromer, times without number. I have known him many, many years."





CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW THE DAY ENDED.

THAT is Rosa's betrothed, I suppose?" remarked I, confidently interrogative.

We had seen them enter a carriage at the door of the Academy, and drive off, Rosa bowing to us through the window, with a flutter of white, blue, and delicate grey, as she waved her hand in farewell.

"How pretty she is!" Is ubjoined, thoughtlessly as I had before spoken.

We were waiting on a corner for a ferry omnibus, Carl glancing impatiently up the street, restless and anxious, lest I should be chilled by the transition from the heated atmosphere of the hall.

"We had better walk up and down to keep you warm," he said. "Take my arm, or I shall lose you in the crowd. That *would* be a misfortune!"

The streets were full of vehicles and people rushing, for the most part, towards the upper portions of the city. The short winter's day was over. There was a strip of orange light close to the horizon, but gas-burners flared in store-windows, dotted the purpling vistas

that stretched away from us in narrowing lines, north, east, south, and west. "Up and down," Carl had said, but we strolled in the direction from which the omnibus must come.

"It is sometimes sound wisdom—and religion—to swim with the tide," moralized my companion. "One bruises and batters himself to no purpose in opposing the inevitable."

Silent and happy, I clung to his arm. I liked the rattle and roar of the human machinery. It soothed, rather than excited me, heard from my safe and pleasant standpoint. It was like the rain on the roof when I was hushed and warm in my little white bed at home, with the door open between my room and the Mother's.

The long, slender sparkles of the lamps at the street-corners met the straight beams of others, unrefracted by the clear air, and wove bridges of golden gossamer above our heads. The frozen pavements rang with a ceaseless—I imagined, a rhythmic clatter, like the forging of a million hammers. A multitude of workmen wrought in this marvellous, ever-growing temple—the life of a great city. At the end of each block, I turned to look for the yellow gleam of the West.

"The river lies down there," said Carl, seeing this.

"That is the reason the air is colder from that quarter."

"I was looking at the sunset," I answered. "It is a bit of something real and familiar in the midst of this brilliant bewilderingness."

He gave me one of his bright, sudden looks.

"That is like you! Where others think of the chill, and damp, and darkness, you go further and find the sunshine."

"Not always," I said, frankly. "But this has been such a wonderful day that its outgoings must rejoice. You know it is said that, at the height of two hundred feet above the earth, to the listener on steeple, tower, and crag, the varying sounds from below, harmonies and discords, are blent into one musical note—F natural—pure, sweet, distinct. It is worth one's while to climb and hearken. Spiritually, I have been lifted to this height this afternoon. I hear only F."

We walked a block farther before he said, for the second time that day, and with the same intonation, "Thank you!"

A blind organ-grinder on the curb-stone was playing a merry little skipping tune, that, insensibly to themselves, quickened the pace of the passers-by. A big dog sat on his haunches beside him, guarding the old hat on the top of the organ. He blinked gratefully at me as I dropped a coin upon the few already within it.

"What a child you are!" smiled Carl, but adding another. "Don't you know it is opposed to all principles of political and social economy, to give money to street-beggars?"

"I don't care for economy, political or social!" I returned, defiantly. "The ring of that silver mite was F to the blind man, to the dog, and to me."

"And if the truth be told, to me, too," he responded. "At last, here is our stage. Are you very tired?"

I was anything but that, and I told him so. I was even sorry that our walk was at an end, and I did not conceal that. He had a right, who had given me the day of delights, to know that I enjoyed every drop of the draught.

It was dark when we reached the ferry. We were barely in time for the six o'clock boat; ran down the steep incline of the floating wharf just in season to spring on board, as the engine gave the first lunge in the water.

"The fate of a nation has been decided by a slighter chance," said Carl, as we caught our breath in a gasp of mutual congratulation. "We might have waited for another boat, but the next train does not leave until nine, and I should have been sorry to fail in my promise to the Mother."

We walked through the ladies' cabin. It was thronged to discomfort; foetid with the reek of garlic, orange-peel, stale tobacco-smoke, impure human bodies and bilge-water, and heated to suffocation.

"Let us go outside?" I begged. "The air is dry and clear, and I am warmly wrapped up."

Another "chance!" Was it another link? The day came when I asked myself the question.

Carl found a sheltered nook for me, forward. A towering load of hay screened me from the wind on one side. I leaned against the outer wall of the cabin, and Carl planted himself in front, to break the river-breeze. The western light, now faded into palest lemon,

smouldered very low upon the horizon. There were greenish dazzles and sparkles directly overhead, which we knew for stars. Every few minutes, a black leviathan, with a flaming red eye in his forehead, snorted and lumbered past us. We carried a red lamp aloft at our bows, that threw out level rays, and left the mass of men, vehicles, and horses beneath in gloom. A strong, continuous hum of talk went on all about us. Now and then a horse stamped or whinnied.

"A sharpish night!" said the burly driver of the hay-wagon to Mr. Cromer. "I'm glad the hay is here to make it some comfortabler for the lady."

"It is an unusual sight—a load of hay going *out* of the city on Saturday night!" replied Carl, pleasantly. "But it is fortunate for us that it is here."

"I got kinky, to-day," said the man, bluntly good-natured. "Dutch kinkiness, if you choose to call it so! Them fellows over there in town tried to beat me down on my price, and I said, sooner nor take a dollar less on the load, I'd haul the hull lot of it back, and *give* it to my dominie. I s'pose *he'll* call it a Providence, for all he wouldn't have had it but for my turning ngly for a spell to-day."

"Have you never heard such a text as 'He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him'?" asked Carl, the peculiarly artless intonation bringing to my imagination, although I could not see his face, the archness of the accompanying smile. "But I am not disposed to give a bad name to what is going to put such a treasure as this mountain of hay into your dominic's barn."

A thump against the side of the boat—a grating crash and a reel—threw me from my footing. Carl caught me, bracing himself by seizing a post. The peaceful scene changed to wildest confusion. Horses were down, struggling and kicking; teamsters vociferating; the whole of the forward part of the boat filled with screaming women and shouting men. From below arose the hissing of embers, the hot breath of steam. Before I could think or speak I was lifted between Carl and the farmer, upon the load of hay, out of the press and trampling; the wagoner was on the wheel-horse calling the faithful beasts by name, and exhorting them to “be still, now, old fellows!” and Carl sat by me, holding me in my place.

“The boat has been run into,” he said, “and injured so much that the water has got at the fires and put them out. But help must come soon.”

“We are sinking!” cried I, with frantic energy. “They all say so!” as a wilder yell arose from the struggling throng. “They are calling for life preservers!”

“It will be some time before the boat can fill and sink,” said the gentle voice, in earnest reassurance. “The river is swarming with other small craft. We shall be heard and be taken off. Should the worst happen, I can swim and hold you up, until we are rescued. Loosen your wrappings, and be ready to throw them off if necessary.”

He pulled off his overcoat, and stooped to his boots.

The bellowing, shrieking, buffeting, and tramping

were fiercer and more deafening. The water was rising in the cabin. Dark figures vaulted over and past us, scrambling to the roof, the wheel-houses—wherever the fight for life could be maintained longest. The alarm-bell jangled ceaselessly, and was answered by steam-whistles and shouts from the river.

In one instant—in a flash of thought—what I mistook for preternatural composure—what I know, now, was the very delirium of excitement, entered and took entire possession of me. I laid my hand on Carl's shoulder; put my mouth to his ear, that what I said might be audible above the din, and spoke out my whole thought as only the certainty of nearing death can win the deceitful heart to speak:

"Carl, you could not live for three minutes in that freezing water, with me clinging to you. You shall not risk your life to save mine! I had rather die for you than live for all the world besides! And I *will*!"

"You don't know what you are saying!" he replied, in a startled voice. "Do you think I would leave you to perish?"

"No! therefore I shall leave you!" and I slid down from the load into the pandemonium below.

I remember that my feet splashed in the icy water on the deck; that I was enwrapped as in the coils of a raging and lashing serpent; tossed this way and that; wrenched, as if the monster would tear me limb from limb; trodden upon and kicked; then, a blow on the head quenched the last spark of consciousness.

I was in a strange place, and in strange hands, when the gleam of reason crept back. I lay on a white bed ; my hair was dabbled with cologne ; my naked arm, from which the sleeve had been cut, was held by one man, while another applied splints and bandage. The pang of resetting the broken bone had recalled my wandering senses. My head ached violently, as did my limbs, but after one wild stare about me, I recalled everything ; started up with force that wrested the wounded limb from the surgeon's fingers.

"Where is Carl—Professor Cromer ? Was he drowned after all ? I tried to save him. I asked God to give me strength to die for him !"

"Nobody was drowned, my dear young lady," began one of the strangers. A woman attendant, whom I had not seen until now, stepped forward with a bottle of volatile salts.

"Poor little thing ! She is out of her head ; and no wonder !"

I put her aside with my left arm—seeing and hearing nothing else for the blessed sight that was granted me—Carl himself, very pale and agitated, but with his own smile faintly touching his lips, and O, such wealth of feeling in his eyes !

"I am here, dear May ; quite safe ; entirely unhurt. I wish I could exchange places with you !"

"No, no !" I said, fervently. "It is better so. Much better. I am very glad, very thankful !"

Faint again, but now with the rush of happiness, I lay back, with closed lids, between which the tears

welled slowly. The low talk of my companions aroused me to the consideration of commonplace things.

"She will be no better on the morrow—probably will be feverish and more stiff and sore than now," said one of the doctors. "I would not advise her removal under ten days, perhaps a fortnight. Cannot you telegraph for her friends?"

"She is not your wife, then?" asked the other, inquisitively.

A strange tingle ran through every fibre of my body.

"Mr. Cromer!" I called, abruptly. "The Mother cannot come here to nurse me, you know. I must go home to-night. I am able—abundantly able. And these hurts are always worse the second day. We will go at once. What time is it?"

We could get the nine o'clock train. The hotel into which I had been carried was close to the ferry and dépôt. The tonic of excitement wrought powerfully within me. I hastened our departure. I could walk. What need for either of the physicians to accompany us into the car? It would but make people stare. I didn't want to be looked at and talked about. Pillows? restoratives? No; I would none of them. Only let me go into the car; into a quiet corner, and—*rest!*

I asked no questions on the way home. I learned, in time, that we had been taken off the sinking boat by other vessels. No lives were lost, but several per

sons were severely injured. Carl had recognized me, after a distracted search, as I was dragged from among the feet of the selfishly-cruel crowd. The light of a lantern, held by a deck-hand, showed him my ghastly face, and limp, distorted limbs. He had thought me dead until the surgeons examined me.

To-night, he tended me with knightly reverence, with brotherly tenderness, until he placed me, weary unto deathliness, in the Mother's arms; helped Felix carry me up to the sofa in her room—the coveted place of the invalid in the household, always, and waited to see the color and light return to my countenance.

Then he sank to one knee at my side.

“Good-night, May. I hope you will have a comfortable, restful night, and be much better in the morning. It is not easy for me to forgive myself for the share I have had in producing your sufferings.”

I saw his eyes fill, in resting on my bandaged arm.

“It doesn't matter,” I said, in clumsy haste. “You were not to blame in the least. You must not think of it.”

“I am not sure that I have not been very much to blame,” he returned, gravely. “And I ought to think of it.”

He kissed the uninjured hand, without another word, and went away.



CHAPTER XIX.

BEAUTIFUL SNOW.

BY the morrow, true to the doctor's prevision, fever laid hold of me ; burned low, but continually in my veins, for more than a week. I did not try to think during this time ; was stupidly indifferent to all that passed without my racked body. Physical pain kept me from losing the sense of my identity, but, beyond the fact that I was, and that I suffered, the dull heat of my brain would not let me go. It was like seeing all objects through the quivering haze that radiates from hot metal.

I knew the Mother and the boys, and when spoken to, I would reply with a sort of mechanical coherence ; then relapse into drowsiness. My wise, loving nurse let me dose in profound quiet, except when it was needful to arouse me for medicine and food ; forbore to strain the nerves by attempting to key them up to their normal pitch. The reaction must have its way. After that, the stimulant. When the fever left me, I slept soundly for ten hours, awaking fairly to myself, and a sense of my weakness, with a desire for food

that proclaimed the effectual defeat of febrile symptoms; a grateful appreciation of all that was done for my bodily comfort, of the love that spoke in every glance and gesture of parent and brothers hovering about my bed, watchful of the faintest sign of amendment, that announced the return of soundness to mind and spirit.

I began to rally on Thursday morning. By Sabbath afternoon I was able to be brought downstairs in Felix's arms, and to lie, wrapped in my dressing-gown, on the lounge in the sitting-room. There was a cheery fire in the grate. The lounge was turned slightly from the wall, that I might see and feel the glow. The Mother covered me with a warm shawl, and set forward, within my reach, and where I could look at it without changing my position, a stand, covered with a white fringed cloth, bearing a bouquet of hot-house flowers, chiefly roses and purple violets, and a glass dish of fruit—grapes and oranges.

"Mamma!" I exclaimed, quickened into real animation by the sight, "how very lovely! Whose are they? Where did they come from?"

"They are yours, love. I thought you would guess at once, who was the donor. Carl went to the city for them, yesterday. I kept them for your surprise-welcome to your place in our family group."

She moved quietly about the room, without a look at my flaming cheeks and down-dropt eyes—setting a chair here, folding a paper there, and, at length, drawing back the curtain of the opposite window.

"It is snowing fast and steadily," she remarked. "We are likely to have a storm that will give the young people good sleighing by Christmas. When I was a girl, we made a point of having a snow-storm in or near the holidays."

I made no answer. Propped by my pillows, I lay and gazed at the flowers and the mingled pale green and golden red of the fruit; inhaled their fragrance, and asked myself why they had been given me; if pity or affection had prompted the act. I had not forgotten one of the insane words I had spoken when a violent death stared me suddenly in the face, nor the reckless leap into the jaws of destruction subsequent events had showed was needless as reckless. My scanty store of worldly wisdom and experience told me that if Carl Cromer were like the majority of his sex, he would despise me forever, for what had escaped me in the extremity of my terror and despair. The goodly sights and odors given to me this hour seemed to say that he might be unlike these. He never offered empty compliments; understood temporizing and trimming as little as he did downright hypocrisy for selfish ends. He would not have undertaken this journey to town to procure exotics with which to gladden the convalescence of one whom he had ceased to respect,—whose friendship was rendered worthless by the discovery that she cherished for him a warmer feeling.

"Carl has been very unhappy about you," resumed the Mother's sweet tones, while she still avoided looking at me. "It was difficult, for some days, to convince

him that you were not in actual danger of your life. I think he never knew how much he cared for his whilom playfellow—the chosen friend of his later years—until this accident taught him what it would be to lose her. He is very impatient to see for himself that you are getting well. I have half promised that he shall have a glimpse of you, and five minutes' talk, by and by."

All this was said brightly, and without significance of tone or look, as if she were relating something altogether natural and usual. Every word was balm and honey to her listener. Could it be that I was more to Carl than ever before? Instead of shunning my society he sought it with importunity. My folly, my unmaidenliness, my outrageous indiscretion in speech and action, had not been comprehended by him in the confusion of the moment of disclosure. Or, if he had gleaned something of my meaning—

I would not follow thought in that direction. I would be calmly happy in present relief and restfulness.

"I shall be glad to see him. He is very kind," I said, hurriedly. "I want to thank him for his acceptable presents. I get better, every minute, with only looking at them. Mamma, will you be so good as to fasten that curtain back, so that I may watch the falling snow?"

She did as I requested, seating herself on the other side of the fire-place, with a book, and read in silence while I looked out at the snow and dreamed. The

house was very still. Those of the students who did not attend afternoon service, were in their dormitories. "Our boys" had gone to church. The air grew sweeter and sweeter with the breath of the flowers—the aroma of the fruit. In the Mother's presence there was all-pervading peace. My thoughts went, unbidden, back to another Winter Sabbath afternoon, when I had luxuriated in the honorable estate of invalidism, lying, as now, softly cushioned and snugly wrapped, and painted an unlikely but gorgeous future for the shy little country girl—the only daughter of the Wyanoake parsonage. The day on which I first saw Carl! How many, many years back in the Past it seemed! Rest—glorious and eternal—upon the golden hills of heaven was Papa's now, in place of wanderings among bleak mountains, darkening with coming night and tempest. Baby Harry walked with him, hand in hand, in the light that knows no change save the brightening from glory to glory. "The boys" were men. I was a woman who thought and dreamed no longer as a child. But home was home still, for *she* made it—the lady of gentle and gracious bearing for whom my eyes and musings presently left the outer world and bewitching snow-fall.

Her hair was silvery by now; folded in smooth bands under the border of the widow's cap. Her eyes were undimmed; her teeth white and even; her face pale and clear as a fine cameo against the dark wainscot behind her. My heart fairly ached with the great love and trust I bore her, as I recalled her life of self-

denial and toil ; her strength, courage, and patience—the depth and breadth, the heroic strain of her *motherliness*—the quality that, more than any other earthly affection, is worthy to be named with the All-Father's love for His children.

Ah ! Ronald might well say that the offspring of such a woman were rich and ennobled beyond the heritors of a principality—or an empire !

Into and over my happy reverie stole and increased a fond consciousness of security, of sure homeness, I can but poorly describe, but which stayed and elevated the soul then, and always afterwards. It was an assured possession to us—to all her children—this grand, steadfast, wise mother-love ! Cast out we might be from other hearts,—condemned and contemned by all the world beside. While she lived, one refuge was ours. While she could think and reason, advice, just and merciful, counsels, true and loving, would never fail us whom God had given to be with her. “Only Mother,” would never have, with us, the meaning it bears in so many households.

“I mean to keep pace with my children in mental development,” said a mother to me the other day—“that when they reach the stature of men and women in intellect as in body, they may not despise, or slight me.”

The Mother—aptly and fondly named by him who awarded her fittest love and reverence—kept beyond us. There is always added comfort and encouragement in perceiving the downward reach of the helping

hand,—that rescue comes to us from a rock that is higher than we.

She laid aside her book when the light was strained dimly through the snow-encrusted panes, and approached me.

“Are you asleep, my daughter?”

“No, Mamma; but very comfortable and happy. It has been a lovely afternoon!”

“You will not feel lonely while I go to prepare tea? It is almost time for the boys to be home from church. I will not let them disturb you with their noisy congratulations. Carl, being so much quieter, may look in upon you, but tell him not to let you talk too much, or I shall forbid his future visits until you are entirely well.”

She kissed me, and I was alone in the earliest shadow of the twilight, the thought of the promised visit touching my quiet fancies as the fire-shine impinged upon the gathering glooms of the room.

A light tap sounded on the panels of the door. It opened before I could respond, and Carl asked: “May I come in?”

An expected interview, if less agitating than an unforeseen, is seldom, if ever, quite satisfactory, at least, in the beginning. I had intended to meet Carl with my accustomed cordiality. He whose anxiety on my account the Mother had described as intense, should have greeted me with something like effusion. Whereas, the truth was that both of us were constrained to a bare show of friendliness, for some minutes.

He was glad to see me looking so well,—or did the imperfect light deceive him?

I was very much better, I thanked him, and hoped to be about the house again, in a few days.

Was my arm very painful still?

Not painful at all, when at rest, except for occasional twinges caused by the knitting of the bone.

I asked a question in my turn.

“Is the snow deep?”

“Four or five inches already. It will be heavy by morning.”

A pause. I made a desperate effort to break the thin, but not-to-be-ignored sheet of ice that was chilling us into utter formality.

“I thank you very heartily, Mr. Cromer, for remembering me, yesterday—for your lovely gifts. They have made a garden of spices of this room, all the snowy afternoon.”

“It would have been strange had I failed to remember you, May! I have thought of you, night and day, since I laid you down in that upper chamber a fortnight ago—the pallid image of the happy, rosy girl the Mother had committed to me in the morning—and left you to her care, not knowing whether life or death were to be your lot. For fifteen minutes after I saw you dragged out of the crowd on the sinking boat, I thought you already dead. That was agony never to be forgotten!”

Another, and an agitated pause. I could not speak,

and he seemed to ponder how best to frame what he would say next. He began somewhat abruptly :

“ I had a long, long talk with the Mother, yesterday. She engaged that what I have it in my heart to tell you, should not be a shock—hardly a surprise. I failed so signally in my attempt to take care of you, that fearful Saturday night, that you may think I ought not to ask another trial. But, if you will trust your happiness for life with me, I promise solemnly, by God’s help, to guard it faithfully. Will you grant me a trial ? ”

That night, when the Mother had sent Carl away, and Felix had insisted upon carrying me up-stairs as if I were a baby, despite my declaration of recovered strength ; when I was laid in bed, but too excited to think of sleep, the Mother sat by me, without other light in the room than that from the fire, and told me another piece of news, almost as startling as that I had heard from her “ new son ”—already and joyfully adopted.

Ronald had accepted a call to a city church—a large and growing congregation in the large and growing town of Mereton, only twenty miles distant from Old Harbor.

“ He begs me to break up here, and come to him—to make him a home,” said the Mother smiling tenderly. “ But I shall not. That is, until he has made a fair trial of place and people, and can afford to keep house without straitening himself. Even then, he should seek a wife to be his home-keeper. By and by, when

the boys are through college, and my May is one-and-twenty, if he should still summon me, I will give the matter a second thought."

For I had heard, among other particulars of her "long, long talk" with Carl, what moved my heart to its depths, with mournful compassion and loving yearnings for my "very own mother"—the unhappy young wife who had drawn her last sigh upon the Mother's bosom. In that solemn hour, the dying had asked and received from the living friend the promise that I, then a babe a few days old, should not marry, with Mrs. Hedden's consent, until I had reached my legal majority.

"She had married at nineteen—and unfortunately," was the explanation given by the foster-mother of the request. "Our little girl is worth waiting for, Carl. And two years will soon pass."





CHAPTER XX.

MAUD.

I AWOKE next morning feverish again, and a prey to a new foe—the demon of neuralgia. The doctor pronounced that I had taken cold, and sternly forbade me to leave my room until he gave me permission. For three days, the paroxysms of pain and alternations of stupor induced by opiates granted me little time for reflection or enjoyment of the society of those I loved. Then I began to rally anew. Carl was allowed to pay me a brief visit on Thursday evening, but the Mother sat in the room all the while to prevent agitating talk. On Friday afternoon, he was again admitted and read aloud to me for an hour, just like the friendly, brotherly Carl of old. Saturday was Christmas, and I was so much better that Felix received permission to carry me downstairs once more. I ate my Christmas dinner alone in the sitting-room, but with a tolerable appetite, and entered with zest into the jovial converse of the family circle that surrounded my lounge, when the meal in the dining-room was over. Ronald had to go to Mereton by the nine o'clock

train, and Carl said "Good-night" to me when the two set out to walk down to the dépôt together.

Thus it happened that I did not learn until Sunday, that Carl had expected to pass the holidays with his relatives in Leighton. It was Felix who spoke of it casually at supper-time, and as if it was quite a matter of course that he should stay where he was, on account of my indisposition. I eagerly seized upon the first moment in which Carl and I were left alone to remonstrate with him on his altered purpose, and beg him to go to his friends as usual. The Mother entered while the question was in full discussion, and, somewhat to my surprise, seconded my motion.

"Thine own friend and thy father's friend forsake not!" she said, smilingly. "Your good uncle deserves much at your hands. Moreover, our little girl here will be fresher and brighter for a few more days of rest and comparative solitude. If you remain in Old Harbor, now that the press of the examinations which kept you busy last week is over, you will be wofully *ennuyé*, unless I sanction many visits to our convalescent and much talking—perhaps evening sessions. She is getting well fast. Leave her to me for awhile, and she will discard all pretensions to invalidism, the sling included."

All was settled as she and I would have it, before my early bed-time.

She helped me dress on Monday morning, and then insisted that I should lie down on the sofa in her chamber before a clear little fire.

"The weather is raw and lowering, with a prospect of another snow-storm," she said. "And since you and I will have the house to ourselves to-day (all three of the boys having gone to the city to meet Ronald and have what they call 'a royal spree') we shall be more cosily comfortable here than downstairs. For I am going to give myself a holiday and spend it with you."

Her blithe accents and the anticipation of our "holiday" were inspiring. I needed them. I had felt almost heroic last night, while banishing Carl for his own and his friends' good, but the case looked very different in the dull light of the winter morning. I was faint-hearted enough to have begged him to stay, but for the tonic of the Mother's presence and words. The room was daintily neat and fresh, a clean chintz cover was on the sofa, and over my flannel wrapper she draped a crimson shawl with an Indian palm-leaf border; one of the few remnants of Miss Van Coyne's elegant *trousseau*.

"I feel like a queen!" smiled I, stroking the soft folds. "Mamma, it is *heavenly* to be loved and petted as I am! I wonder sometimes, when I shall awake and find it all a dream!"

"Tea and muffins and a broiled bird may convince you that you are in a world of realities," was her answer, as Nelly, our faithful maid-of-all-work, brought in a waiter covered with a white napkin.

A half-blown tea-rose lay by my cup, and I felt my cheeks tingle at sight of it; took it up shyly as if doubting my right to claim it.

"Carl will not go until the 9.30 train," observed the Mother, busy with cream-jug and sugar-dish. "If you eat a satisfactory breakfast he may come in and say 'Good-by.'"

Blushes, trembling, and uncertainty passed, like the cloud of a breath from a clear mirror, at his entrance. His smile and greeting were just what they had been for months past—the months during which I had rested happy and fearless, upon his declaration that I was "the dearest child in the world" to him. His love was not the frail gorgeous blossom of a day, but the sturdy, symmetrical growth of years. It would be very absurd for him to flutter my weak pulses with such passionate incoherence of talk as I had read and heard of. His nature was calm and deep. His demonstrations of affection would not be wild, or other than rational, even now that I was strong enough to listen and reply to whatever he might have to say. We had nothing new to learn of one another, now that we were assured of our mutual affection, except as through the influence of that master-emotion, our respective characters should develop into strength and beauty. For I, on my part, must, I felt, grow into a perfection of womanhood I could never have approximated but for the revelation of his attachment.

"You *are* getting well in earnest, I believe!" he said, meeting my smile of greeting with one yet brighter; and, sitting on a low stool at my feet he retained my hand in his cool, firm grasp, while he went on talking, playfully, but still speaking to and of me as something

very precious, that was now, beyond question or recall, his own.

"You will let me hear from her every day, Mother?" he said, the dear name falling naturally and musically from his lips. "And should she seem never so little uncomfortable—should fever or neuralgia, or the vapors threaten another relapse, please telegraph at once. Do the same"—archly—"should she fancy that she wants to see me. Although that is a hypothetical case hardly within the reach of my fancy. "You know, May, dear"—he added changing manner and tone entirely as the Mother considerably stepped into the adjoining room, for a housekeeping confabulation with Nelly,— "that I would not leave you to-day, did you not agree perfectly in my conviction of the duty I owe my uncle. His house was my home after my father's death, and my mother died there, blessing him as the best brother that ever cared for a widowed sister. He would be sadly disappointed were I to fail him after engaging long ago, to go to him at Christmas. I knew all this last night, when I was combating your arguments and entreaties that I would obey duty rather than inclination, but I was loth to own that you and the Mother were right. I shall be back on Friday afternoon—sooner, should you need me.'"

How strange it was to have him thus consult and defer to my wishes with respect to his actions! There was something almost awful in the right and responsibilities which had come to be mine within the last week. Eight days ago, I was a feeble, sick girl, who was ready,

in the self-abasement of her solitary musings, to consider herself a waif on the sea of chance, a cipher on the wrong side of the sum of his life, and of little value to any one else. And he bent before me, now, in the glow and beauty of his young manhood, honored and admired by all the small world of which I had any personal knowledge—my lover—my vassal, did I will to make him such; bidding me, in grave sincerity—“Say ‘Go,’ and I go! ‘Do this,’ and it is done!”

I have never marvelled since that moment of solemn and supreme exaltation, that so many women’s heads are turned by the sudden appreciation of the height to which love has raised them; that, from giddiness they rush into vain-glory and audacity; become greedy for continual display of their power. In my incredulity and timidity, I recoiled at the mere suggestion of interference with Carl’s plans, or those of his kindred; felt like the veriest mote of dust upon the cogs of their wheel of purpose.

“I would not have you break your engagement upon any consideration!” I hastened to declare, forgetting the abject failure of purpose that had overtaken me at my awakening that morning. “I shall be very happy here with Mamma. She has arranged a charming programme for the day, and you know how entertaining she is always. She is to be all mine until the boys come home. And it may be best that I should be a little lonely for some days. I want leisure and quiet—time to think.”

A look I did not comprehend flashed over his face.

His fingers closed convulsively upon mine—a cold, tense clasp that frightened me.

“To think!” he repeated, lowly and hurriedly. “Does that mean to reconsider what you said to me a week ago? Was I too hasty? Did I take too much for granted? I have refrained from references and questions that might agitate you while you were so far from well—but now that you can think and judge and determine for yourself, for Heaven’s sake—as you value your own happiness, May—which is worth so much more than mine—take all the time you wish for determining what your future life shall be! I would not take ungenerous advantage of the admissions drawn from you in the hour of pain and weakness. I could never forgive myself were I to hurry you on to what you may regret hereafter.”

His agitation—the scruples that seemed strained—the conclusions that seemed far-fetched in this rapid appeal—made me bold to calm and encourage him. I laid my lips unasked, to the hand fastened over mine.

“I shall never regret it!” I said. “I shall be glad and proud, all my life long, of what *you* said to me a week ago. It is because it is all so new and beautiful—this wonderful existence to which you have introduced me—that I would have time to think it over—to learn to believe in it—and how to live in it as I should. It is I who should advise you to careful reconsideration of your action. For—” feeling myself color deeply—“you must not forget, Carl, that I am not like other girls. A lame lady told me once, that

she had never let herself think of marriage as a possible event for her. And, as she said it, she looked hard at me as if to point a hint. You are used to the blemish on my face,—but have you thought how you will like to have strangers stare at me—and even your friends wonder at your taste ? ”

“ My dear, brave girl ! If your face is sweet and fair to me, what do you suppose I care about other people’s whims and impertinence ? And this is—honestly, now, May !—the only objection you can put forward to our continued engagement ? ”

“ What objection could I have—” said I, daring to glance at his pale, earnest face—“ except that you might have done so much better for yourself ? that I am not one-millionth part good enough for you ? For—” courageously, while my blush brightened into flame—“ I cannot remember when I did not love you—from the first time I ever saw you ? ”

He sighed, as in unutterable relief, as he bent down and kissed my forehead. It struck me as almost ridiculous that he should care so much for the poor little gift of my love. As if I had ever seen his peer among men !

“ You shall never regret saying that to me, my noble, faithful girl ! ” he said, much moved. “ Now I must go, dear ! Good-bye ! keep yourself well and happy for me ! God keep and guide us both ! ”

The dull skies stooped lower and lower, as the forenoon wore on after Carl’s departure. Now and then, a gust of north-east wind blew roughly across the sullen

leaden expanse, ruffling it into frowns that filled the air with a whirling flurry of snow. The same sharp wind had swept the frozen river bare, and the ice showed blackly between the drifts on the banks. A bleak, miserable day it must have looked to most people's eyes. To me, wrapped in my Oriental splendor of crimson palm-leaves—the tea-rose opening on my bosom, the warmth of the brisk red fire chasing afar all suspicion of chill from my limbs, as the knowledge of Carl's love filled my heart with summer gladness and promise, I said aloud, that there was never finer Christmas weather. At twelve o'clock the snow began to fall in steady earnest.

"The cars reached Leighton an hour and more ago," I remarked, when our luncheon-tray had gone downstairs. "Is not this delightful? I hope it will snow all day long. Mamma! it is good to be here with you; just you and me alone!" I put my head on her knee, my arm about her waist, as she sat by me on her low sewing-chair. "I have been dull company for you this morning; but I had so much to think of! Not only what has happened to me lately, but of other things, about which I want to talk to you. While you were downstairs preparing luncheon, I went into the other room and got this out of my drawer."

I put a miniature into her hand. The picture of a very lovely young girl, with thoughtful eyes, and a mouth that seemed made for smiles. The curly chestnut hair was looped above the left temple with a white rose. A pearl brooch fastened the lace *berthé* over

plump, drooping shoulders. She was a patrician beauty, yet guileless and winsome as a peasant child.

"She was but eighteen years old when that was taken, you have told me," I continued. "And she married at nineteen. You forbade me to talk about it the other night, because you were afraid I would become excited and over-wearied. But you promised once—in the Wyanoake church-yard—on that last day, you remember, Mamma—to tell me all about it when I should be old enough to understand. Surely, you can never have a better time than now?"

The Mother's eyes were filling slowly, while she studied the picture. She did not answer at once. When she did, it was with evident unwillingness to satisfy me, or doubt as to the propriety of doing so.

"What do you wish to know, my daughter? I have told you that your mother was very attractive in person and in character; that she was dear to me as a beloved younger sister, and that she was unhappy in her married life. You have heard that she died in my arms, commending you to me with her latest breath. Darling! you will not be the happier for hearing more."

"I long to know all, nevertheless," I pleaded. "If I could tell you how much I have thought and imagined about her, all these years! How strong is my persuasion at times, that she is near me; that she remembers and yearns, even in Heaven, over me—her only child! you could not refuse to indulge me in this matter. Last night after you had told me to try to

sleep and left me, I could have been sure that, just as I was falling into a gentle doze she came to my bedside and kissed me. She was just my age when she loved and was married. Mamma, what made her wretched after that? Was my father unkind to her? He could hardly have been a wicked man, since he was your cousin. I am not a weak baby who cannot bear to hear the truth. I will listen quietly to it all. Does not the history of my parents belong to me, of right?

"Perhaps so," was the thoughtful reply. "You are a brave girl, and a sensible one. It may be a mistaken impulse of humanity to suffer you to honor a false ideal of an earthly father, instead of opening your eyes to the truth. Warren Van Coyne, my cousin once removed, and your father, was *not* a good man, May. I think he was treacherous and selfish even in his boyhood, when his beauty and showy talents made him the idol of his own family, the admiration of school and college-mates. I cannot remember when I did not distrust him, for we were playfellows in our infancy.

"When, at the age of twenty-six, he removed to the city which was my home, and entered upon the practice of law, he became a constant visitor at my father's house. Gay, brilliant and handsome, he was, for a few months as popular in our household as in the society that welcomed him as an ornament. For a year I was accused by my relatives of unreasoning prejudice, because I did not join in the chorus that praised him as a model of manly grace, mental and moral gifts. His

very desire to please me and to conform, in outward seeming, to what he supposed was my standard of excellence, made me withdraw myself the more resolutely from the intimacy he would have courted. My father mildly reproved me for my reserved deportment toward his kinsman; my brother loudly declared Warren to be the 'prince of fine fellows,' and railed at my want of discrimination.

"All this, Maud Farley, my father's orphaned ward—a merry affectionate child of thirteen, heard and hid in her heart. She was my pet and room-mate, and it was probably on this account that Warren singled her out as a favorite, winning his way to her confidence by a thousand delicate arts, such as no man knew better how to employ. That she became, through his wiles, the innocent spy upon every action, I learned when it was too late to guard my conduct. By means of information dexterously extorted from her, he surmised that there was a growing, but unavowed attachment between Felix Hedden and myself. With characteristic subtlety he imparted his suspicion to my father, and at the same time asked permission to address me on his own behalf."

"Did he really love you, Mamma? And did Maud know it?"

"I cannot say, dear, how far his professed attachment was sincere, or to what extent he was moved to declare it by the fact of my prospective heiress-ship, my father being then a very wealthy man. Maud was flattered by being made his confidante, and—dear child!

—wept over my obduracy. My decided rejection of Warren's suit was the occasion of a painful family scene, in which my brother Ronald was my only supporter. In the heat of his indignation at what he considered unwarrantable persecution of his sister, he made certain disclosures relative to Warren's principles and habits that turned the course of my father's anger. Investigation of what had been thus hinted at showed, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that the chosen associate of my brothers—all three of whom were younger than himself—the man whom my father would have made his son-in-law, was a gambler and a sensualist, who laughed, over his wine-cup and dice, at every law, human and divine. He had tempted my youngest brother, Theodore, to the very brink of ruin. There was a whisper of a forged note, drawn up, Theodore said, by Warren but presented, by himself at the bank where his father's account was kept. My father paid the money without betraying the nature of the transaction, and, we suspected, also bribed Warren to leave the city and the country. None of us saw him again for five years. Then he reappeared in the fashionable circles that had mourned his absence, handsomer and more fascinating than ever. He was not allowed to enter my father's house, where Maud still resided, an elderly kinswoman having taken my place as housekeeper and her companion, at my marriage to Mr. Hedden. Secretly and skilfully, he sought a renewal of the friendship that had been so much to the child. It was a fearfully—a pitifully unequal game! He was an accomplished

man of the world, versed in every phase and shade of human emotion, the victor of many hearts, a student of women's foibles and frailties in many lands. She was imaginative, generous to a fault, impetuous in feeling, language, and act, and about him hung for her the glamour of the earlier days when she was proud of notice from one whom all united in praising. He taught her to love him madly and entirely; taught her how to foil the vigilance of my love and the Argus eyes of professional gossips;—finally prevailed upon her to elope with him.

“ She left a letter for me, pleading her devotion ‘to him whom she had at heart worshipped for years’ as the excuse for her flight, and her knowledge of the unconquerable and groundless aversion felt for him by every member of her guardian’s family as the explanation of the secrecy with which their intercourse had been conducted. She begged me ‘to remember and love her always, and, for her sake, to try and think better, more justly and kindly of Warren, to understand him aright, and honor his real nobility of character.’ She had faith in him, she added, and ‘in the final triumph of the right to believe that his innocence of all degrading charges, and the lofty heroism that had led him to prefer the implication of disgrace to betrayal of the trust reposed in him by another, would yet be brought to the light of day; that I would approve of her choice as heartily as I was inclined, in my ignorance and prejudice, to condemn it.’ Warren wrote to my father from New Orleans demanding his wife’s fortune, which was,

by the terms of her father's will, to be placed in her hands at her marriage, at whatever age. It was surrendered promptly, and all intercourse between Maud and ourselves ceased. I had written to her once, in reply to her farewell, assuring her of my continued affection, and how fervently I desired her happiness. Foreseeing the probability that the letter would fall into Warren's hands, I carefully avoided saying anything that might wound his vanity or anger him. She never received it, although I had addressed it according to her instructions.

"More than a year after her flight, I was sitting in the dining-room of the Wyanoake Parsonage, in the November twilight, rocking Baby Kate to sleep in my arms while Ronald played with two year-old Maud on the rug before the fire. I was expecting Papa home from a tramp over the hills—his first parish visitation—and when I heard a vehicle stop at the gate, and voices in conversation, I supposed that some kind neighbor had brought him home. A knock at the door undeceived me. Ronald ran to open it, and I stirred the fire to a blaze that I might see the visitor's face. A wan, travel-stained figure stood on the threshold, tottered toward me with outstretched arms. As I reached her, she sank helplessly at my feet, still clinging to me, and looking up—with such agony of appeal in her eyes. It was my sweet little playfellow—my more than sister, for I loved her as my child—my once pretty, bright Maud, who had come back to me!"

The Mother laid her face to mine, and our tears mingled silently.

I saw it all—the cottage room, with its air of humble cheer; the blazing logs on the hearth; the bewildered children staring at the apparition; the figure clutching the Mother's dress; the white face that gazed upward in doubt and entreaty and wretchedness,—the white face which looked downward with divinest pity, and love that was salvation, in the tender eyes.

She had drawn the picture for me with those few strokes. My poor little mother! Thank Heaven for the impulse that directed your faltering feet and fainting heart to this sure refuge!





CHAPTER XXI

“THE BIRTH-MARK”

Y love! this will never do!” whispered the Mother, by and by, as my sobs became violent. “We had better talk no more about this until you are well and strong. Remember, my May, that it is all over. Your mother has been happy in Heaven all the years of your life. Our tears are in sympathy with a memory; not shed for her as she is now. And”—with a playful accent—“what will Carl say to me if you are worse for this excitement? I am responsible to him for the condition in which he finds you on his return. You would not have him quarrel with me?”

I brushed away the thick rain from my eyelashes.

“I shall not be worse, but better, for knowing what you have to tell,” I said. “Please leave nothing to my imagination which will exaggerate the reality, if that were possible. As to Carl—the saddest thought of all to me, Mamma, is that when my mother married, she loved, and believed in her husband as truly and steadfastly as I trust in Carl’s honor and fidelity.

What an awakening! Did it come very soon? I will listen quietly."

"I would let Maud tell me nothing, that night, except that she had left Warren's house in his absence and, travelled without stopping to rest, until the carriage she had hired at Wiltfield set her down at my door. She was fearfully weary, and her nervous prostration alarmed me yet more. I hastened to get her to bed: forced her to take a little nourishing food, and gave her an anodyne. When I left her room at midnight, she had slumbered soundly for two hours, and she did not awake until late in the forenoon of the next day. I insisted that she should not attempt to rise, and she submitted meekly to this, and other requirements. Lying languidly among the pillows, her dark eyes, unnaturally large and bright, following my movements about the chamber, she more than once murmured that she was 'thankful,' and that 'God was good!' By evening, she looked and felt stronger, and begged to be propped up in bed that she 'might talk with me while she could.' Then, I heard the story of her life since we had lost sight of her.

"Warren Van Coyne was an adept in dissimulation, but even he did not care to wear a mask when there was nothing to be gained by it. Maud had brought him wealth; perhaps he felt that by his elopement he had revenged himself upon her guardian and his family for the real or fancied wrongs inflicted upon him by the withdrawal of their confidence. He exulted openly in the belief that he had punished me for my rejection

of himself and marriage to a poorer man, for my great love for Maud was well known to him. He installed her as nominal mistress of an elegant house, and would have launched her with himself, upon the highest tide of fashionable dissipation, in the gay city he had chosen as the theatre of his future operations. When she tired of frivolity and was scandalized at the laxity of morals revealed by the talk and behavior of his associates, he laughed good-humoredly at her puritanical scruples and told her to be happy in her own way. It was not until he found that she expected to have his society in the comparative seclusion of domestic life, that she was inconsolable for the loss of this, and the lovely attentions she had believed would be yet more fond and constant from the husband—that he spoke plainly and strongly. Tears and exactions, he made her understand, repelled and disgusted him. Home-life, with but one pettish, sentimental girl for company, was a species of purgatory to which he would not, and could not submit in body, or in spirit. If they were to maintain the semblance of matrimonial felicity, if they were to live together in tolerable comfort to themselves, she must recognize his right to select his own friends, his own occupations and recreations, and to come and go as he pleased. Romance and love-talk, except as a pastime, with a pretty woman who was not his wife—bored him.

“He meant all he said and more. He would have her become the puppet of his will; the bedizened ornament of his dinner and evening-parties; the screen of disreputable flirtations,—a toy to be played with, or

wholly neglected, according to his whim. Never coarse or violent in language or bearing to her, he was yet an unfeeling tyrant, whose silken rein held a bit of steel ; who forced upon her hospitable consideration guests whom she abhorred, and made her appear in the eyes of those whose respect she would have won, the willing participant in the orgies which were the wonder of the town, so brilliant were they in their appointments, so extravagant and audacious was the conduct of those attended them. He could not sully the purity of her soul and heart. He could and he did make her unspeakably miserable.

" Time showed him to be as cruel as he was selfish and sensual. A few months before her flight, he entered her room one evening, and in the courteous terms in which he always made such demands, told her to prepare to join a boating-party he had arranged with the guests who were then staying with them at their country house on the river. Most of these were young ladies, and since the boats would be out very late upon the water, it was necessary that the mistress of the mansion should act as chaperone of the thoughtless creatures. No one paid more careful heed to the lesser proprieties, and adjusted disputed points of etiquette more judiciously, than did he when expediency seemed to require that these should be regarded. Maud had been sick all day, as he knew, and ventured to say feebly that she could not sit up for a moment without pain and faintness. If the expedition could be deferred to the morrow, she hoped to be able to meet his

wishes. He was inflexible. With the same elaborate courtesy, under which she could always detect a vein of insolent sarcasm, he regretted her indisposition, which he doubted not would speedily be forgotten in the society of certain gentlemen whom he would detail as her especial escort. Pleasurable excitement and the river air would do her good. So sure was he of this, that his conscience would not allow him to accept her excuses. The boats were ordered, and the other ladies were getting ready. He would call by her room again in half an hour.

"Then, turning to her maid, a young quadroon, whose faithful attachment to, and care of herself had endeared her to the lonely-hearted Maud—'You will see,' he said, 'that your mistress is dressed even to her bonnet, by that time. I shall hold you responsible if she keeps us waiting.'

"'Indeed, sir, she is not fit to leave her room or her bed,' returned the girl, respectfully, but earnestly. 'If you only knew how sick she is—'

"He interrupted her by a stroke across the face, from the light cane he carried. It laid the cheek bare to the bone. At sight of the blood Maud fainted, and remained so ill all night, that the physicians pronounced her life and that of her unborn child to be in imminent danger."

"'Mamma!' I gasped, a scorching light breaking in upon my brain.

I looked the query I could not word. The birth-mark on my cheek pulsed and burned like a live coal.

The Mother kissed the glowing spot, laid her hand softly over it.

"I promised to tell you that it was not her fault," she said, simply and seriously. "Else, I should have omitted this incident in the record of her wrongs. I willingly pass over the details of the dear child's sufferings. When increasing ill-health compelled her to remain quietly at home, Warren deserted her for days together, without warning of his going, or account of his occupations while away. Often she was in profound ignorance as to the direction of his wanderings; would have been utterly at a loss how to summon him, had sickness or accident made his presence necessary. It was during one of these mysterious absences that she gained positive information of his perfidy to herself, and heartless treatment of another woman who had loved and trusted him. The evidence was clear as noon-day, and her whole upright nature revolted at the thought of remaining longer under his roof. She would not countenance his baseness by seeming to be, for a single hour, a partaker in his crimes. I think she *dared* not await his return and charge him openly with what he had done, so broken was the once proud spirit by months of misery. She fled, like an outcast, from her luxurious house, taking but one trunk of clothing, and enough money to pay her expenses to Wyanoake. She had seen in a northern paper, a notice of our change of home.

"I could not have come even to you, Kate, had you still lived in the city," she said. "But this seemed

such a safe hiding-place! You will not let him or anybody else know that I am here—will you? At least not for a few days! After that it will not matter. If God will only let my baby die with me! But His will be done!’

“She spoke of the certainty of speedy death for herself with tranquil assurance that seemed the more strange when, after a day or two, she crept downstairs, and took her place as one of the household. She even assumed, with a pretty persistency that reminded me of her girlish days, such light domestic duties as she had strength to perform.

“‘Let me help you all I can, Kate!’ she pleaded. ‘There is so little of my day left. It is almost sundown, dear!’

“She had been with us but a week when my name-baby, just four months old, sickened with inflammation of the lungs and died in twenty-four hours after the seizure. Maud came to my room on the night of the day in which little Kate was buried, and would undress me with her own hands and see me in bed before she retired herself. Then she stood gazing steadfastly into the empty cradle set against the wall at the far side of the room.

“‘Kate!’ she said in a sweet, thrilling voice I fancy I can hear yet, speaking very slowly and thoughtfully—‘If God should see fit that my little child should live, don’t you think it might be a comfort to you now?’

“‘A great comfort!’ I answered. ‘A precious gift from Him and from you!’

"She kissed and thanked me, knelt by my bed, holding my hand, and hid her face for a minute in silent prayer; then, saying, 'Our Father bless and deal with you mercifully as you have dealt with me and mine!' went to her chamber.

"The next day, at noon, you were born. Neither the physician nor Mrs. West, who was with me at her bedside, saw any symptom of immediate or threatening danger. Yet about four o'clock she sent for Mr. Hedden, and requested him to baptize you as you lay on her arm. When this was over she asked that I might be left alone with her and the baby. You slept soundly while she talked to me of her unshaken conviction that her release was near at hand, and what were her wishes in-regard to you. You were to take the name of Hedden, and be known, whenever this could be done, as my child. 'But'—she said this tenderly, stroking your face with her wasted hand—'would I tell you sometimes of your dead mother, and let you love her as dearly as was compatible with your duty to me?' When you were old enough to understand it, I was to relate her sad history to you, or so much of it as I thought best. It was during this conversation, which I made as brief as I could, lest she should be wearied, that she asked me not to let you marry under twenty-one years of age.

"'I must have been wiser had I been two years older—don't you think so, Kate?' she added with pathetic emphasis. 'Tell my darling how young I was, and what a spoiled, impulsive child I had been always.

Don't let her imagine that I was very weak and wicked, except in deceiving and distrusting my best friends. And I did come back to you at last! It seems too good to be true that I shall, after all, die in your arms!

"I would not let her say more, and she soon became drowsy, falling asleep with you on her bosom. I sat still a long while, watching her quiet slumber, and then, fearing your weight might oppress her, tried gently to remove you. She held you more closely, murmuring, without opening her eyes—'No, no! my baby!' and I left you in her embrace. I fancied at length that her respiration was growing shorter, and putting my finger upon her pulse, was alarmed to find it so faint as scarcely to be perceptible. I called Mrs. West, and we sent at once for the physician. But no restoratives could win back the ebbing life. She spoke but twice again. Once as I drew you from her chill arms, she appeared to appreciate that the change was needful for you, and whispered, 'Take care of her! Good-by, sweet one!' I laid your cheek to the lips that tried to form a kiss, and she relapsed into stupor. At seven o'clock in the evening, she unclosed her eyes suddenly, looked intelligently into mine, spoke in the same deliberate accents I had heard from her the night before.

"'I said it was near sundown. It is *sunrise*, Kate!'

"She ceased to breathe half an hour afterwards."

Neither of us wept in the long pause that followed

the story. The stillness of the room had something holy in it. I could not grieve that the rest and peace of dawn had soothed my mother's tried spirit when flesh and heart failed. It would be selfish to mourn that the dawn had brightened into the noon of endless glory and incomparable joy. I rather thanked God out of exaltation which was almost rapture, that release had been vouchsafed just when she looked and longed for it. I should never wish again that she had outlived the day of my birth,—the day that ended with 'sunrise.'"

I have learned since that the beautiful old story of the dove and the ark is oftener repeated in the lives of God's beloved ones than we in our short-sightedness are apt or willing to believe. Weary of wing and of heart He may allow them to be, finding no foothold of rest until mortal strength is spent, but He never lets the waters swallow them up. Theirs may be but a blind and dizzy flight toward Him, by reason of feebleness and fear. He knows just when to put forth His hand and draw them Within. What must that Within have been to the sweet, white soul that fluttered to His bosom so many years ago, after the wild, angry waste she had overflowed to gain that shelter!

It quieted, not saddened me to reflect that the snowflakes were falling purely and deeply upon her grave this very hour. She seemed so safe, so far beyond the troubling of the wicked, in that lonely churchyard shut in by the everlasting hills.

"And her husband?" I asked at last. I could not

say "my father." "Did he ever come for her—or for me?"

"Never! We learned indirectly that he sailed for Europe shortly after her death. If he suspected the direction of her flight, he did not intimate it in any manner. He must have guessed that she would naturally come to me, for she had known no other mother. But he neither wrote nor sent. Maud never feared, nor did I, that he would claim his child. He disliked babies, and would not voluntarily burden himself with the care of a motherless girl. Should the knowledge of your birth come to him, she implored me never to resign you to his keeping, or the charge of any one selected by him.

"'Companionship with him means contamination,' she said, fearfully. 'Do not I know the secrets of my prison-house? Never forget, Kate, that she belongs to you—you alone!'

"So you were ours, darling—Papa's and mine—absolutely, from the first. After the death of my little Maudie, which occurred in the following March, you were the only daughter in our home—a joy and a blessing always. I felt as secure in the possession of my treasure before your father's death as afterward."

"He is dead, then?" I said, drawing a long breath.

Ever since she had first mentioned his name, I had been haunted by a vague idea—not dread, yet as certainly not hope—that I should hear that he was still alive, and that in the future, through an overstrained conception of filial duty, I might be compelled to meet

and pay him outward respect. The man for whom the gentle charity of the narrator did not offer to plead, must have been a villain of the blackest dye. He was dead, then! The only legacy I was to have from him to whom I owed my birth, was the red insignia of his shame branded upon my cheek. Yet the knowledge that he had passed to his account unrepentant, or at least without attempt at restitution to the child he had wronged, brought a shock with it.

"He died fourteen years ago," was the reply. "There was nothing in his last days that you would take comfort in hearing, dearest. He was a wanderer to the end, bound by no tie of home or country. He died as he had lived. Of your mother's fortune not a vestige remained in this country after he left it. He probably squandered it all before his death. Papa was too unworldly to have thought of trying to secure from him a maintenance for you, even if this could have been done without perilling our chances of keeping you. Remembering your mother's solemn injunctions, we believed that we were consulting your real good in rearing you in virtuous poverty.

"Now my love, you must rest for awhile. We will talk no more of this to-day!"

She spoke firmly, but affectionately; drew the shawl over my shoulders, added a lump of coal to the fire, pulled down the window-shades, and went out.

I understood her too well to oppose her will. It was a belief with her, that a portion of each day should be spent in solitude by all who would acquire the habit of

thinking and feeling aright. When we were children, the punishment for our fits of passion and naughty actions was meditation, each by himself, apart, in a room closed against all the others.

I recollect that Felix, once, hearing Ronald pass the chamber-door in which he was confined, called piteously through the key-hole—"I say, Ron! will you ask the Mother if I may stop thinking? I'm awfully sorry I was a bad boy, and will ask anybody's pardon, you know, and I don't care to come out, but I want to know if *I may stop thinking* about that. It's no end of a worry!"

As we grew older, our monitress contrived that the opportunity for connected, undisturbed thought should be granted to every member of her family during some part of the day, however busy the season. "The still hour," we learned to call that which succeeded the bustle of "clearing up" after dinner. The door of her room was usually locked then, and until she appeared among us dressed for the afternoon and evening. She was wont to say that no prison-rule seemed to her more ingeniously refined in cruelty than that which, in the case of certain celebrated prisoners of state, enjoined that the accused should never, by day or night, be alone for a single instant.

"Brain, nerves, and spirit crave rest in solitude as flowers do the darkness and the dews," she argued. "There are problems of life which each soul must decide for itself and by itself. When this truth is once acknowledged, one will seek, not shun, occasions for

doing this. It is often better to think out a perplexity than to talk it out.”

I did not waste my still hour, on this snowy afternoon, in vain tears or longings for human sympathy. True, my brain throbbed wildly with the flood of thoughts let in upon it by the revelation to which I had listened. But I perceived the significance of the Mother's commendation of me, in the height of my excitement, to lonely reflection. I had always felt that some mystery, which was to me awful and delicious by turns, enveloped my birth and antecedents. I had woven the most marvellous of my day-dreams about this consciousness, which was scarcely more than an impression caught from my reputed parents' reticence with respect to my relatives and family history. I was now to accustom myself to the fact of my parentage ; to understand that I had heard all that could be told me, and remand the whole sad tale to its proper place in the volume of the Altogether-Past ; to go forward to meet the Future, with which it had nothing to do, except so far as the lessons I might draw from it must influence thought, temper, and action. I should never be the heroine of complications and adventures arising from my dissipated mystery, nor the heiress of a late repentant father, nor yet the tardily recognized daughter of an ancient and honorable house that would delight to do *me* honor. My mother was an orphan, without brother or sister, whom a bad man had married from mingled avarice and revenge. Both my parents were dead. I was their only child, penniless and non-

expectant of fortune or reflected fame. I took up these truths and their moral and laid them to heart; holding fast to them until heaving brain and troubled spirit gradually settled and cleared, and the dews and darkness wrought in me their ministry.

With the early dusk appeared the Mother and the evening lamp.

"I have had a telegram from Ronald, asking leave to keep the boys with him in the city until to-morrow," she said. "He is indeed giving them a grand holiday treat! Supper will be up soon. I hope my little girl will be able to do justice to it. And afterwards we will have the book Carl left with me for you. That is, if you will be satisfied with me as a reader?"

"Satisfied!" I repeated. "I have never outgrown the idea that you are the finest reader I ever heard. We shall have a delightful evening!"

I said it cheerily, because I saw she desired it, and the effort cost me less than I had expected. There was a minute's pause, while she mended the fire and wheeled up the round table in readiness for the tea-equipage.

"Mamma!"

"My love?"

"Does Carl know what you have told me?"

"Yes, dear—and loves you the more fondly since he has heard it."

I was silent for a longer interval. Then my voice quivered slightly.

"I cannot understand—it does not seem right—why do you think that the Father suffered such sorrows to

fall upon my mother,—pious, loving, and lovely as she was,—yet sends to me, who am so full of imperfections and fair to so few eyes, such wealth of blessedness?"


"I do not cloud my mind or vex my soul with the question, dear child! Let it suffice us to know that, however varied our present and surface lives, He has no hurtful partialities. That sounds tame and trite, but it is an anchor that holds fast when winds are fierce and contrary."





CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIRST CHILL.

NE year went by, swiftly, evenly, happily. My engagement made very little difference in the outer life of our household. At my earnest request, in which I was sustained by the Mother's judgment, the altered relations of Carl and myself were explained to nobody beyond his relatives and mine. I shrank from public comment, and needed no conventional congratulations to fill up the measure of my bliss. I would rather hedge it in, in its purity and beauty, from the careless gaze of passers-by; guard its delicacy from the risk of rude handling.

Our intercourse would have seemed tame enough to the lovers of romance, the seekers after sensational details; my content in the same more like the calm satisfaction of a wife than the coy yet exacting affection of a betrothed. But, for me, the deep ecstasy of every moment passed in Carl's presence, the delicious, soulful dreaming of the hours in which he was out of my bodily sight, were beyond spoken or imagined com-

parison. Certainly the lower earth held nothing of delight and value worthy to be set against these. For that one year out of the many I have known, life was round, perfect, shining, without flicker or cloud.

Yet my routine of duty, with its variation of recreations, was humdrum enough in the eyes of my young lady associates. These were, for the most part, the daughters of college professors, clergymen, physicians, and lawyers, and a very few mercantile men who could see far enough above the rim of a dollar to perceive that the Mother was a lady by birth and breeding, although now the keeper of a students' boarding-house. I gathered something of my acquaintances' sentiments with respect to my daily life and probable prospects from their compassionate looks and kindly endeavors to shed upon the gray uniformity of my lot a gleam of real enjoyment in the shape of invitations to pleasure-parties, offers to lend me fashion-books and patterns, and their insatiable inclination to entertain me with stories of their conquests and flirtations. I was diverted, not chagrined, at the ingenuous betrayal of the conviction that I was not likely to know much of the latter sweets and sauces of girlhood by personal experience; their practical application of the dogma that reflected light was better than utter darkness. I was so rich, and so blessed in the knowledge of my riches, that I could afford to make merry in delicious secrecy over their ignorance. Not that I failed to appreciate their benevolent intentions, or that I undervalued the social advantages of which they would make me a partaker,

with themselves—gay, giddy, but not heartless creatures of present and surface delights.

Of my own accord, before the Mother represented to me the propriety of a change in my almost conventual habits, I began the diligent study of external charms of manner and person. I fought successfully with my native shyness, and availed myself of every opportunity of noticing and acquiring the easy grace of deportment and conversation I had hitherto been content to admire, without thought of emulation, in those who were rightly esteemed ornaments of our limited social circle. Carl must never be ashamed of his choice. If earnest resolve and patient effort could achieve my end, he should, in time, be proud of me. I studied hard during those twelve months,—music, French, German, *belles lettres*,—whatever seemed to me needful to add elegance to the solid education I had received. I learned to talk well and fluently, and upon higher topics than usually engaged the tongues of the afore-said young companions. I dressed better, too, for the never-plethoric purse was several degrees less lank than of yore. Ronald had, in spite of Carl's remonstrances, repaid the loan that had enabled him to prosecute his collegiate studies, and this was, in turn, passed over to Felix for his board and tuition fees, with the stipulation that it was to descend, after his graduation, to Albert and Mark. Besides this, Ronald's presents to the Mother and myself were many and valuable, and a welcome contribution to the comeliness and comfort of us all.

"The tide turned for us exactly one year ago," I said to myself, on the evening of the 19th of December, as I sat alone in the sitting-room busy with the last stitches of a dressing-gown which was to be my Christmas gift to Ronald.

The Mother had a visitor in the parlor—a business call, I supposed, since I had received no summons to join them. The murmur of their voices came at intervals to me across the hall. It was a windy night. There was a ceaseless roar in the tree-tops. Once in a while a broken twig or dry leaf tapped at the window nearest me. Carl would be here presently. This was what the wind sang, whether in hoarse monotone among the bending boughs, or shrill pipe through key-hole and chance crevice.

"One year ago!" I repeated. "That Sabbath evening-time, on which there was light, was the glorious dawn of our better days. It is a marvel,—and a beautiful one,—how inseparably connected with all of prosperity that had visited our home within my recollection has been the agency of him whom I used to call, in my childish grandiloquence, our 'benefactor.' But for him, Ronald would never have entered college in Old Harbor. But for him, this would not have been our refuge when we were obliged to leave Wyanoake. But for him—what would be now *my* estate of mind and heart?"

I laid down my needle to clear my eyes before glancing at my watch to see how soon I might expect him. My watch! to the possession I was not yet

accustomed! It was of suitable size and style for a lady's wear, and had been Carl's gift on my twentieth birthday, a fortnight before. Smiles made a sunshower of the tears as I handled (I had nearly written dandled) the treasure, recognizing in it a visible link of the chain my thoughts were weaving. Was not all of grace and elegance I could boast, directly or secondarily, from him? Was ever another woman so favored and so happy as was I—the penniless orphan whom a coarse tongue had once, in my hearing, called a “foundling”? The scornful phrase seemed to ring again in my ear; invoked other memories of the evening on which it was spoken. I pitied the scared, wild-eyed little creature who had crept from her bed, in the freezing midnight, to seek in the old dictionary the meaning of the word, and been saved from the depths of despairing humiliation by the angel's whisper—“our child!” God's and the Mother's! Pitied her as one belonging to a world from which I had passed into enduring peace and brightness. I often caught myself ruminating upon the Wyanoake days at this period of exultant security of affluence; was not superior to the wish that those who had known and despised me then could see me now that I had come to my kingdom transfigured by the exceeding blessedness that was meted out to me from day to day, from hour to hour.

The wind, blowing high and low, sang on the same measure, “Carl is coming presently!” Through all the chambers of my heart, open and garnished, mur-

mured fragrant and musical airs in response. My work lay on my knee. Still holding my watch, I mused and hearkened, my pulses keeping time to the ticking of the unseen wheels. I was seldom demonstrative of my love and gratitude, as lovers rate demonstrativeness. Talk freely I did to Carl,—more frankly than to any one else, upon every topic; appreciating entirely and joyfully the truth that converse with him was but another form of self-communion. In nearing the subject of what I owed and felt for him, I became tongue-tied and awkward, except when some unexpected act of kindness,—a loving word or glance,—took my shamefacedness by surprise, and my heart leaped to my lips in brief, impassioned phrase I as frequently as not left half unspoken.

On this evening, my solitary reverie had been so interpenetrated with thoughts of him; the sense of his wondrous goodness, and my as wondrous happiness, wrought so mightily within me that, when he entered, I cast aside my work, and ran toward him with extended arms, crying out:

“Carl! Carl! it is too beautiful to be true! Can it be wicked to love—to *worship* any mortal as I do you?”

He looked startled—I could have fancied almost shocked—by the unprecedented salutation. But he was moved, too. Gathering my hands in one of his, he drew me up to him and kissed my forehead twice, before speaking.

“You shall never regret it, May, darling, if I can

help it. It humbles me to remember how little I deserve the devotion of such a heart."

I had to stand on tiptoe to lay my hand upon his mouth; at which we both laughed, and thus the little scene passed over. He brought me a bouquet in memory of the anniversary. It had been ordered from the city, and was packed in a box, a layer of damp cotton wool protecting the flowers from bruises and the nipping outer air. When I had thanked him, admired the blossoms, and put them in a vase on the table, I was apparently quite composed; sat down to my sewing as demurely and contentedly as would a matron of fifty.

"'How doth the little busy bee!'" quoted Carl, watching my fingers. "Do you know I never could commit the whole of that celebrated lyric to memory? I think because my ears were boxed by my first teacher for failing in the task."

"You surely recollect how

"'Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do?'"

returned I.

It was the veriest nonsense, and sportively uttered. But he made no reply; and looking up to see why he was silent, I met his gaze—curious, inquiring, doubtful,—strangely perplexed, if not really troubled.

"What is the matter?" I asked in surprise.

"Why do you select those lines as a test-question?" inquired he, still with the odd expression I could not interpret.

"They were the first that occurred to me: I suppose because they are the truest and best known in the set of verses—I cannot call them either hymn or poem," I replied. "I assuredly did not meditate any offensive application to so industrious a personage as yourself."

"They may, nevertheless, convey a warning." He was not to be coaxed out of his serious mood. "Not that your shot was anything but random, but it told upon what was passing in my mind at the instant. I am in a quandary, and I was just deliberating upon the expediency of referring the question at issue to you, when you assailed me with the ancient and honorable couplet."

He smiled now, seeing me grow sober at the suggestion of responsibility.

"Don't be alarmed. The question is only where I shall pass the Christmas holidays."

"I thought you had concluded to go to your uncle in Leighton. You ought not to remain in Old Harbor. You need change of air and place, as I have told you before."

"And as everybody else says," he assented, reluctantly. "Don't send me away from you, May! Indeed, I am sincere in declaring that I am happier here and with you than anywhere else!"

Again the troubled look, and the pleading intonation matched it. He was not well. Study and late hours had enfeebled his nerves; made him unduly sensitive; more than usually dependent upon my care and sympathy. Comprehending this, I spoke soothingly:

"I do not doubt that. But, dear Carl, your health is of more importance to me than the present gratification of either or both of us. We are sensible grown people—not silly children. You must have a few days of other Christmas cheer than that you would find on the Mother's table (I don't say it will be better fare), and the sight of other scenes than Old Harbor can furnish. You will return feeling like a different and a younger man."

He was staring straight at the fire—spoke abstractedly, as if he had paid little attention to my remarks.

"I have had two invitations, this afternoon, to the same place. One is from Otis Wagner. By the way, he has accepted a call to the largest Presbyterian church in Mereton; so he and Roland will be neighbors. The other is from Mrs. Wagner, his aunt, who was always very kind to me as boy and man. She tells me that her daughter is to be married on the 26th, and begs me to be present. There is to be quite a party there throughout the holidays. Otis Wagner will perform the ceremony."

My countenance fell. I was conscious of this, and feared that he must observe it. I was loath to explain why I decided, at once and positively, that I did not wish him to visit the Wyanoake Wagners then or ever again. It was like their insolence to invite him! I said petulantly to myself, forgetting that Mrs. Wagner had always stood our friend, and that none of the family was cognizant of Professor Cromer's betrothal to me. I was not then—I never had been—it was absurd

to believe that I ever could be—jealous of the Wagner girls. I did not believe in presentiments of any kind. Honestly, I could not tolerate the idea of his accepting the hospitality of Papa's ruffianly persecutor; of his associating on friendly terms with the supercilious nephew and the daughters whose insults to myself—the shrinking, ill-dressed child who clung to his arm for protection and support on that other Christmas night ten years ago—had burned and fretted into my soul like so many drops of cruel caustic. I could not help wondering that he could forget these things; that he stood ready to condone such grievous offences to the innocent and suffering by his presence at the wedding and participation in the attendant festivities. I reasoned—still within myself—that were he the aggrieved one, I would never, never strike hands with the author of the wrong. I had not learned then what I believe firmly and upon ample evidence now; namely, that the love of most women is far more loyal and courageous than that of men. Husbands and lovers have died sooner than reveal the guilt of wives and mistresses, but perished protesting their own innocence of complicity in the crime. Women, with more far-sighted devotion, have boldly avowed themselves the criminals, and suffered with joy the death of the body—triumphant in the thought that by self-immolation they secured the safety and honor of the one beloved. Moral cowardice—I set it down deliberately—is oftener a masculine than a feminine trait,



CHAPTER XXIII.

UNCLE RONALD.

SAT mutely picking out the basting-threads from the quilted silk facings of Ronald's dressing-gown, my head bent needlessly low, until I could stifle my disappointment so far to control features and voice.

Then I said, with all the cordiality I could assume: "You will have a pleasant time, no doubt. Mr. Atlee—the gentleman we saw with Rosa at the concert—is the bridegroom, I suppose?"

"Yes. But"—this with hesitation—"I will not go, if you object."

"Object! Why should I?" rallying to refute the implication of his manner. "I am not unreasonable nor tyrannical, nor a simpleton, Carl! If you think your holiday will be best enjoyed with your friends in Wyanoake, go, by all means! I would not throw a straw of difficulty in your path. When will you go?"

"Not until the morning of the 26th. I shall eat my Christmas dinner here—at home—with you."

"That will be a real boon to us," rejoined I, yet more cheerfully. "Otherwise, the Mother, the boys, and I, would be quite by ourselves."

"I thought Ronald was coming over."

"So he is! Isn't he one of the boys?"

My chagrin betrayed me into sharpness in almost every sentence. A ware of this, I laughed to rob this question of the tart ring.

"We shall never think of him as a man and a reverend clergyman until he is a graybeard, I am afraid."

Carl was studying my countenance again—doubtfully, almost furtively; a sort of appeal against my caprice or selfishness that wounded me to the quick. It was plain that he understood me to-night as imperfectly as I did him.

"You are *sure* you are willing to have me accept these invitations, May? that you will have no hard thoughts of me for leaving you here while I am off taking my pleasure?"

"Hard thoughts at Christmas-time? Hard thoughts of you at any season?" repeated I, and I could face him now fearlessly. "Don't misjudge me, dear! You ought to know by this time that happiness to you means that I am happy also."

Nevertheless, the sore feeling lingered at the core of my heart. When he had bidden me "Good-night," I ran up to my chamber, locked the door, threw myself across the foot of the bed, and cried long and sadly,—longer and more sadly for the melancholy

refrain the wind hummed and piped between the shaking sashes of my window.

I had dried my eyes, or exhausted their founts, and, lying still and miserable where I had cast myself down, was gazing at the winter moon riding high and white in the heavens, when Felix knocked at my door.

"Are you asleep, May? If you have not gone to bed, the Mother wants you downstairs."

He was loitering in the hall when I emerged from my doleful solitude.

"Do you know who is in the parlor?" he said in an excited undertone. "No less a personage than our Uncle Ronald from China! He has not visited America before in twenty years and upward. He looks like a Guy, with his yellow face, stubbly hair, and seedy habiliments; but I am inclined to think him a niceish individual, for all that."

I coincided in the latter opinion when a tall, thin old gentleman, with a complexion like a greenish lemon, set off by a brush of short, stiff, white hair, held my hand tightly in his, and, scanning my visage with keen, kindly eyes, said: "There is a strong likeness to Maud here, Kate! I should have observed it anywhere. You must call me 'uncle,' my child."

The Mother leaned fondly on his arm.

"You will consent to stay with us, Ronald, instead of returning to the hotel? And not to leave us until after Christmas-day? There are so few of us left! and you and I were always nearer akin to one another than most brothers and sisters are."

"From what I have seen and heard—from Tom and Theodore, not from you!—they have been more distant relatives to you in America than was I at the antipodes. I did write to you once every five or six years, much as I hate correspondence. While they—the rascals!—knowing just how you were situated—"

"Had their own families to provide for, and to engage thoughts and affections," she interrupted, mildly. "I am too happy to-night to remember anything except that you are to be our guest until after the holidays, and as much longer as we can persuade you to stay. Felix and Albert will go down to the hotel for your baggage."

Uncle Ronald made a wry face.

"My baggage is one small valise! Before you send for it, I had better tell you frankly that this is my only suit of clothes. Think twice before you present such a shabby, battered specimen of a returned prodigal, who has starved for a quarter of a century on rice-husks, to your friends as your guest and brother. I ought to have brought a fortune home with me, or laid my bones in the Flowery Land,—but I was homesick, Katie!"

"I never expected you to grow rich. I heard several years since, indirectly, from Theodore, who chanced to meet my husband in the city, that you had been unsuccessful in business. Not even the Chinese could teach you the tricks of sharpers and misers, Ronald. If you were a millionaire, I would not dare press the hospitalities of our humble home upon you."

She spoke gayly as a girl, patting her brother's shoulder as she released him. The question was settled. Uncle Ronald was to belong to us for a week or more, and it must be confessed that his wealthier relatives made no attempt to reverse his decision. A lively, intelligent, if somewhat eccentric, visitor we found him. He had an inexhaustible fund of anecdote, stories of foreign lands, and adventures that enchained the eager attention of us all; reminiscences of his boyhood and early friends, of which he and the Mother never wearied. That instead of returning a nabob to his native land, he had brought little besides the very shabby coat on his back, apparently troubled him no more than did the shabbiness of the coat itself. It was a very disreputable garment, frayed on the edges everywhere, stained and smeared on lappels and sleeves. There were occasional rips in the seams; the buttons were worn and loose, some wanting entirely, and every pocket was ragged. What was true of the coat might likewise be affirmed of waistcoat and pantaloons. We liked Uncle Ronald from the first. We soon learned to love him. But we could not deny that his outward seeming was that of a rusty, slovenly old bachelor.

Seeing which, the Mother's exquisite sense of neatness and comeliness and her notable instincts were aroused. Her brother was beguiled into putting on Felix's dressing-gown, one evening after supper, and was then left in the charge of his nephews until bedtime. It was two o'clock A. M. when the Mother hung his coat on a chair outside of his chamber door. She

had ripped off the frayed and faded binding and substituted new galloon ; mended every rent ; relined the sleeves ; scoured, sponged, and pressed the whole garment with professional expertness, acquired by her many years of service as a clergyman's helpmeet and the mother of four fast-growing boys. She had bought, and I hemmed, a black silk cravat, which was laid on the coat in the hope that it would supersede the rumpled, tattered wisp he had heretofore worn twisted about his throat. He appeared at breakfast in the trim respectability of both coat and cravat, much to the satisfaction of those who were in the secret of the renovation of his apparel. I say "secret," because the funniest part of it all was his unconsciousness of the change in his appearance.

"He was always the most absent-minded creature alive," said the Mother, complacent in the success of her pious stratagem. "I have known him to come to breakfast without either coat or vest on, and to forget to wear his hat in the street. A careful wife might have cured him of these peculiarities. As it is, they have strengthened with years."

With the boys' help, she abstracted one garment after another from his room at night ; repaired, made over, and cleaned them, until he sat down to our family dinner on Christmas Day, decent, if a trifle old-fashioned, in apparel, a well-looking, well-bred gentleman, whom we regarded with cleverly suppressed but intense glee and profound gratification.

"If we had arrayed him in Horace Walpole's peach-

blossom coat, and a pair of sky-blue shorts with knee-buckles, he wouldn't have discovered it," said Felix. "His blindness is absolutely fatuous—or sublime! At any rate it is delicious, and the Mother is a princess in diplomacy as in everything else."

Between Uncle Ronald and his nephew-namesake there sprang up at once a lively and mutual liking. We all sat late over the Yule-fire that night, but these two were the principal talkers. They were as unlike in mind as in feature, but each being richly endowed with that rarest and most to be coveted of gifts men, for the lack of a better name, term "personal magnetism,"—the subtle influence which draws out all that is best and most attractive in others, and thus teaches them love for the magician by making them in love with themselves,—both were in their happiest mood and mien.

The Mother had the seat of honor—an easy-chair in the warmest, cosiest corner of the hearth. A hand-screen I had worked for her warded off the fiercest rays of fire and lamp, and from out the shadow her beautiful eyes looked, in prideful love upon her earthly all. A rich and a happy woman she esteemed herself to be.

"For the rest—those who have gone on a little way before, know all about it, and are glad in our joy," she had said to me, while we made ready the holiday supper. "Our sorrow cannot lessen their bliss, but we are nowhere taught that the knowledge of our happiness may not heighten it. I like to believe that they

are really with and of us in our family gatherings, partners of our interests and delights. But were this not so, the dear Elder Brother who knows their hearts and ours, who loves us the better because we love one another, will surely tell them of our welfare and continued affection. There is not a day, there is scarcely an hour, in which I do not ask Him to do this. I 'send my love'—as we say in every-day life—to my darlings by His safe and tender hand. He will not forget my message, or let them forget me."

Her faith was sincere. The slightest wall built with hands divides the loving and beloved of this lower world more effectually than does the river of death such souls as hers from treasures secure and unseen.

I was thinking of these things, longingly and not unhappily, when Carl touched my hand.

"May, love! do you hear that?"

He seldom addressed me by any endearing appellation in the hearing of others, even when the hearers were members of our own household. But he had been unusually attentive and affectionate to me all day; tenderness I attributed to regret at our approaching separation. His eyes—mournful and pleading, for what, I could not conjecture—followed me wherever I moved; searched mine with earnest inquiry, that verged upon sadness. Twice he had renewed his entreaty that I would allow him to remain where he was during the holidays, and I had reiterated my refusal. I was confirmed in my purpose of sending him away by Ronald's observations upon his friend's changed

looks, and the slight, hacking cough Dr. Brownson had assured us was nervous or dyspeptic.

"Cromer has been working too hard, Maysie," said my brother to me, confidentially. "I don't like that cough, and he is a mere shadow of the man who came to Old Harbor two years ago. He ought to have a month in the dry, bracing air of Wyanoake, instead of a week. There is good hunting there at this season. Otis Wagner tells me the mountains are full of partridges, quails, and hares."

A sudden heart-leap threw the blood in hot jets to my cheeks and temples at Carl's touch and query.

"I beg your pardon!" I said, hastily. "I have heard nothing. What is the matter?"

Ronald explained, kindly indulgent of my reverie. There was to be a great Sabbath-school jubilee in Mereton, on December 27th. Mrs. Sibwright, a member of Ronald's church, in whose house he had found a pleasant home since his removal to the city, had sent a pressing invitation to all of us to be present at the anniversary exercises, as her guest. The Mother could not leave home conveniently, just now, it presently appeared. Felix had engagements in Old Harbor, where young gentlemen were at a premium during the holidays, that "forbade him to think of deserting the post of duty," so he stated the case. Shy Albert had his post also. He "wanted to study up on Professor Ralstone's lectures, now that he had a few days of leisure." So the Mereton party was narrowed down to Uncle Ronald and myself. He was anxious to see his name-

sake's home, church, and people, and "always ready for an outing that promised well."

I consented to go simply because Carl advised me to accept the invitation. Turning my own battery upon me, he insisted that I had lost color, flesh, and vivacity lately; that I was moping and overwrought; that I needed change of scene and diet; finally—and this was for my ears only—that he would start for Wyanoake with a lighter heart and conscience, if he were assured that I was having a merry time with Ronald's friends.

He thanked me for yielding to his request at our "good-night" parting, and yet more heartily when I presided over his six o'clock breakfast next morning.

"To quote the words of the dearest little woman in the world: 'happiness to you means that I am happy also,'" he said. "Promise me that you will never doubt this, darling! Nor that I will remain faithful to you everywhere and always!"

I promised. It cost me no effort to do so. Yet I could have denied him nothing in reason, or out of it, just then. I went with him to the door that, opening, let in the gray, frosty dawn upon the yellow lamplight of the hall. There was no one astir in the house excepting ourselves. The streets were empty, and an unextinguished gas-burner at the corner made the as yet feeble day more wan. Afar off sounded the faint scream, then the nearing puff! puff! of the coming train.

"A merry holiday, and a happy reunion to us both,

my May!" said Carl, turning back to me for a last "good-by." "I shall write every other day, at least."

"Not until the bridal din is fairly over!" I answered. "I shall be patient and considerate."

Before shutting the door, I stayed to hear the panting halt of the locomotive at the depot under the hill, and the shriek with which it recommenced its labors. The morning-star, large, clear, a tremulous drop of lustre, hung upon the pale cheek of the new day. One other star was dying in the zenith, and the pearly tint of the sky was changing to blue.

"Rosa Wagner's wedding-day!" I said to myself, and knew that I was not so indifferent to the event as I had all along believed.

Nay, more. I was glad she was to be married. Why, I would not ask or admit, even to myself.





CHAPTER XXIV.

POMPS AND VANITIES.

I OUGHT to have had no leisure for discontented musings in the two days that elapsed between Carl's leave-taking and my departure for Mereton. Ronald's Christmas present to me was notably splendid,—a silk dress—the 'first new colored silk I had ever had, twenty years old though I was. It was thick, soft, and lustrous, and in hue matched the misty richness of a dove's breast. I handled it with emotions akin to awed incredulity. It seemed far too grand for my daily, or even weekly wear, yet it was a settled thing that we—the Mother and I—were to make it up on the day after our Christmas dinner.

There was an unusually good fire and a scrupulously clean hearth in the sitting-room, which I had swept before breakfast with exceeding care. The cover was removed from the broad centre-table, a sheet spread upon the carpet beside it, to receive the shining folds should they slide to the floor while we were "cutting out," and nine o'clock saw us hard at work,—the sew-

ing-machine Ronald and Carl had presented to the Mother in the Fall clicking gayly over the otherwise dreary length of skirt-seams and flounce-hems.

"Ronald's taste was always remarkably good even in the matter of feminine gear," I remarked, while bast- ing up a sleeve. "But he has really surpassed him- self this time. How came he by any knowledge of the texture and fashionable shades of dress-silks?"

"He had advice from a lady-friend—the Miss Brainerd of whom you have heard him speak," an- swered the Mother. "Indeed, I believe she selected the dress, with little help from him. He only told her for whom it was intended."

"Miss Brainerd!" echoed I, knowingly. "Mamma, has it never occurred to you—"

"Hey-day!" cried Uncle Ronald, stopping short on the threshold. "I suppose this means temporary exile for all of our sex!"

"Not a bit of it!" I returned, heartily. "There is always room for you at this fireside, or any other at which the Mother and I are sitting. That is to say, if you don't mind dress-making gossip about bias and ruffle and goring and shaping."

He had come in, and was standing by me looking on curiously at my work.

"I haven't seen the like in twenty-five years!" he said. "And you really know how to make your own clothes, kitten? I thought from what I had heard and read, that hired machines—human and inanimate—did all that for American ladies, nowadays."

"Not for this girl!" retorted I. "If I could afford it—which I cannot—I should be sorry to lose the pleasure of making over old dresses and making up new ones. It is a frolic with us always, and when a new one is on the tapis—an event!"

He watched my motions in silence, until I looked up to see why he did not sit down or speak.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said slowly, with an odd twinkle in his eye, "if I had some flummery in my boxes that might go well with that. My trunks came an hour or so ago. Unless I am mistaken, there are some articles stowed away in odd corners that would suit better for women's toggery than for men's; which are too fantastic to be worn by me, even with my Christmas coat, vest, and trousers."

I laughed outright, and the Mother actually blushed.

"Never mind, Kate," he pursued. "It was but another proof that the best things improve with age—especially good sisters. I did not think one-tenth so much of the suit 'when this old coat was new.' But about these kickshaws that are littering up my boxes! I fell into the habit, ages ago, when I expected from year to year to revisit America, of buying trifles that I thought might please you and your daughters, if you had any. I don't know that you can make use of any of them. Indeed, they may prove as valueless to you as they are to me. But may I bring them down, and make them over to you? for the rag-bag—if they are good for nothing else?"

"What a boy you are still!" smiled his sister.

"We shall be very glad to look them over. It was kind in you to remember us in this way."

It was evident to me that she, with me, anticipated examining a motley collection of such gaudy trumpery as undirected bachelors are wont to bring from foreign lands to delight—or confound—their lady-friends. But we were both of us touched by this proof of his loving recollection of us; said to one another again, when he had run upstairs with the glee of a boy meditating a joyful surprise, how kind he was, and how lovable, and how much we enjoyed having him with us.

"We will be pleased, and show him that we are gratified with his gifts, however ill-chosen they may seem to us," added the Mother. "He has been an exile so long, it is hardly reasonable to expect him to understand and minister to the tastes of American women of this generation."

He re-entered while she spoke, bringing a box about half as deep and twice as wide as a tea-chest, and made of lacquered wood.

"How deliciously oriental!" I cried, glad that I could be honestly enthusiastic about something in the exhibition.

"You may have it for a shoe-box when it is empty," he rejoined.

"Nothing less elegant than Cinderella's slippers should be kept in it," said I, as at the lifting of the lid, a subtle, exquisite odor stole into the air,—the scent of rare gums and spicy woods.

The boys—Felix, Albert, and Mark—had joined the

group about the magic chest as the owner balanced it upon the elbows of a big chair, his face as merry as theirs. The "trifles" he had spoken of—Chinese puzzles and carvings of ivory and shell, and a box of water-colors, were on the top and were given to Mark. Next came a superb chess-board and men for Albert; then a morocco case of European workmanship.

"For you, Felix! because you are your father's namesake," said his uncle. "I have another—but not a better one—for Ronald."

For once, the gay youth was speechless with emotion when he beheld a neat watch—gold, with a hunting-case, his initials engraved on the inside.

"I could not give it to the son of a nobler, purer, more righteous gentleman!" subjoined the donor, emphatically.

"Ronald! brother!" burst from the Mother's lips. "But was this fair to yourself? These are costly gifts."

"I was not so poor when I bought them as I am now, Kate. Nothing else I have been able to save from the wreck that carried down the bulk of my worldly fortune, can give me so much pleasure as the distribution of these. They should have come a day earlier, to be fairly seasonable. Felix, you monkey! stop admiring the effect of your time-piece upon your manly beauty, and give this to your mother!"

It was a lustreless black silk, with *crêpe* for trimming.

"I guessed you would not care to wear colors, Kate,"

was her brother's accompanying remark, so simply and feelingly uttered that she had not voice to speak her thanks.

My turn was last, and the magnificence of my present the crowning sensation of the occasion. I caught my breath hysterically as he threw over the skirt of the unmade dress lying on the table, a piece of lace such as I had never imagined, for width, fineness, and beauty. It was nothing I could think of except the delicate tracery of the frost-work I had seen on my window-panes, at my early rising that day, or the beaded gossamer Ronald and I used to call "the drapery of the fairies' ball-room," when we beheld it lying whitely over the tall grass and bramble-hedges on September mornings in the field back of the Parsonage.

"I haven't a symptom of the man-milliner about me, but it strikes me that it is not amiss with the dove-color. Eh?" interrogated Uncle Ronald, with gleeful *nïaveté*. "And how about this?"

He drew from a flat box a Canton *crêpe* shawl, such as was fashionable at that date,—creamy-white, and heavy with embroidery.

I shrank back. "Not for me!" I said. "I never had anything half so superb in all my life. I should not venture to wear it!"

"It is none too grand for Mereton carriage-calls! Or"—affecting to whisper—"for a professor's bride in sober Old Harbor! Keep it, May-blossom! As to the lace, make yourself pretty with it for church-parties

and jubilees in your brother's congregation. There are some collars and other fal-lals in this"—forcing a small parcel into my hand—"that may do to go with it. Not another word"—for finding our tongues, we all began to thank him at once.

He put his hands over his ears, and fairly ran away, up the staircase—three steps at a time—to his own room. The boys were wild over their treasures; the Mother sat, smoothing down the folds of her silk, a beautiful light in her eyes and a fond smile upon her lips. As for me, I dropped upon the carpet, rested my face on a chair, and cried heartily.

I so loved pretty things! and I had had so few in my life-time! I so longed to look pretty myself—to be more fair in Carl's sight than any other woman, and my opportunities for personal adornment had hitherto been so limited! It may have been an unworthy sentiment, but, mingling with my pleasure in my new riches, was a touch of self-pity for past deprivations that added abundance to the stream. I seemed never to have comprehended how pinched and poor my wardrobe had been until I saw myself, in anticipation, arrayed as were other girls of my rank, but of superior means. I cried the harder, presently, for shame that I had admitted so mean a pang; could have begged the Mother's pardon on my knees, when she lifted my head to her lap and tried to soothe my foolish sobbing.

"I am very silly"—I began.

"No, love! only a little overcome by the wonderful surprise—and a trifle more nervous than usual," she

interrupted. "Would you cry less—or more, if I were to open the mysterious parcel clutched so tightly in these hot little fingers?"

I had forgotten it. But I wiped my eyes to look at the two sets of lace—point and Valenciennes—the brooch, ear-rings, and bracelets of pink coral it contained.

"Fal-lals, forsooth!" I ejaculated, in genuine indignation, at which the others laughed.

"Mother!" said wise Albert, "Uncle Ronald must have been very rich when he bought these things. How did he lose his fortune?"

She sighed—then smiled.

"Poor, dear Roland! He has failed in business four times since he became his own master. He can make money fast enough, but he cannot keep it. He is too trustful of his kind; too ready to help others, to be a successful man of the world. Knowing these characteristics as I do, I have been careful that he should never suspect how poor we were—if we ever *were* poor! There are other riches besides money and lands, silks and laces;" tapping my cheek. "Come, little girl! My hopes of finishing your dress are stronger now that we have lace for trimming. Have you thought how much ruffling, binding, and gathering it will save us?"

I sewed industriously all the rest of that day, but in a semi-trance. I could have fancied that I was intoxicated by the pervasive odor of the Indian lacquered chest, fresh wafts of which floated up to me with

every movement, as I adjusted the lace to its place on waist and sleeves, wondering hazily that the timidity with which I touched it, at first, gave way to familiar complacency, now that each firm stitch seemed to secure it as my very own. At ten o'clock that night I put on the completed robe; fastened the point-lace collar about my neck with the coral brooch; clasped the ear-rings in my ears, the bracelets on my wrists, and, not without a tremor at my temerity, took the shawl from its case, folded it around my shoulders, and went down the stairs with a stately tread—the more slowly that I might prolong the enjoyment of hearing the rustle of my train from step to step. I was in a quiver of excitement; full of mischievous expectation of the effect of the apparition upon the family group in the sitting-room.

Felix had just returned from a skating-party down the river, and the others were listening so attentively to his description of it, that I stood in the middle of the room, smiling and blushing, before they were aware of my approach. There was a general exclamation. I distinguished Uncle Ronald's most clearly.

“Great Heavens! it is Maud to the life!”

I turned to thank him, but his gaze held me dumb—so piercing and mournful was it. It was as if the surprise caused by my appearance had been the touch that scattered the ashes from a heart of living fire. I surmised then what I learned months later, from his voluntary confession to me in the hour when I needed all loving consolations—that he had loved my young,

beautiful mother deeply and hopelessly. I never wondered again that mine was Benjamin's portion of the foreign souvenirs.

The pallid intentness was gone from his face in another second; and although he said little, his manner showed cordial appreciation of the praises lavished upon my outfit. The boys behaved preposterously, as was their custom. I was their only sister, and from Ronald down, they persisted in speaking of and treating me as if I were of finer clay than themselves.

"French porcelain!" Felix said, once, when I remarked upon this absurd habit. "A bit of choice *Sevres* we won't let anybody handle roughly. Professor Cromer may consider it a high compliment that we permit him to be custodian of it."

Deprecation and argument were useless where my claims to their admiration were concerned. If I had believed one-tenth of the nonsense they talked on this subject, my small head would have been a very bubble of vanity. To-night, however, it was easier than usual to permit their homage. If fine feathers made fine birds, I had never looked so well before; there was less hyperbole in their asseveration "that not another girl in town could hold a candle to our May." I deemed it but decent, however, to demur.

"You said pretty much the same thing, Master Felix, ten years ago, when I wore an old black silk of Mamma's—cut over and cut down—to my first party. And a miserable one it was!"

"At old Wagner's—wasn't it?" said the irreverent

youngster. "There is no flattery in calling you prettier now than either of the demoiselles Wagner, and that is saying a good deal, for Rose-of-the-world—she was christened Rosamond, wasn't she?—is a witching little being."

"Where have you seen her lately?" asked I, in surprise.

"Didn't the professor tell you that we met them in the city, three weeks ago—the Saturday he and I went over together? They were shopping—buying wedding trumpery, I suppose; but we encountered them on the street, and all went to a picture-gallery to see a painting everybody was going wild about. We must have loitered away half an hour there. I didn't propose the expedition, as you may suppose. I rather think the ladies did, or at least appeared shy about going without an escort. I wouldn't hold back because they were Carl's old friends, and they assuredly made themselves very charming. Carl probably forgot all about it, for he was all agog about that set of Greek classics for Ronald, and looked restless even while the fair Rosamond was doing her prettiest to entertain him. Or maybe he didn't mention the meeting because he knows you cannot abide the sound of the Wagner name. Not that I like you the less for *that!*"

This speech made me uncomfortable when it was uttered. It recurred to me, bringing something very like remorse when I had passed triumphantly the nominal ordeal of home-criticism and returned to my

chamber. Checking myself in the act of setting my lamp down upon the table, I went out into the hall and along the cross-entry leading to Carl's dormitory.

He did not suspect it, but I never allowed a housemaid to touch so much as a book there. The sweeping, dusting, and general arrangement of the apartment were done by myself. It was in perfect order now, for I had gone thither directly after bidding him farewell in the morning, had said my prayers there, kneeling at his chair when I had set all to rights save my own perplexed thoughts. He had refused to have the old-fashioned furniture exchanged for such as would accord better with his means and position.

"Every fold in the hangings has its story for me, May," he said. "And as for the rug, I would not exchange it for the finest Turkish or Persian. One of these days, we will talk together of upholstery for our cottage. Now, let me enjoy my bower, without intrusive suggestions of its shabbiness."

We had, by dint of coaxing and scolding, prevailed upon him to banish the disreputable rag of a carpet, and, at his request, the Mother and I had selected one of shaded grays, specked with blue. I recollected, as my eye fell upon it now, how obstinately but laughingly he had rejected one in which the soberer hue was relieved by scarlet.

"Mustn't I then have my curtains looped with red?" he asked, piteously. "I *cannot* give up the blue ribbons! And, May, if they should ever fade, don't let me know when you substitute new blue ones

for them. I like to imagine that they are always the same—perennially fresh.”

I did not know until he said that, that Ronald had betrayed the secret of the rent blue sash, gladly sacrificed to make the aforesaid ribbons.

Book-shelves lined two sides of the room. Carl's writing-table was at one corner of the hearth, where the light from a window would fall over his left shoulder. The picture of his mother, who had died while he was in college, hung opposite this, and beneath it, a framed photograph of myself. I walked straight up to it, and examined it closely, as I would inspect the likeness of a stranger. Then I put my lamp on the bureau, placed myself in the broadest of its beams, and scanned the figure reflected in the mirror.

Was I like my beautiful mother? Had Felix spoken truly in declaring that I was handsomer than Rosa Wagner?

I began to hate that girl. She seemed born to set me at a disadvantage in the eyes to which I would be most fair. Perhaps Carl believed that I quite hated her. His silence respecting her, when not obliged to mention her name, his embarrassment when he could not avoid allusion to the Wagners, were significant. Even Felix had noticed this. I must appear spiteful and vindictive in cherishing the memory of family wrongs. Perhaps he set down my aversion to the Wagner household to the score of personal grudge. My heart grew very sore. Why could not the “witching little being,” who had compelled my brother's un-

willing admiration,—the almost bride of her chosen “Walter,”—the woman to whom such splendor as my present unaccustomed array was an every-day affair, leave me unmolested in my obscurity? Carl Cromer was no more to her than twenty other men;—the toy of an hour; the instrument upon which to practise her skill in handling hearts. I thought of the rich man and his herds, and the peasant’s one lamb, with heat that was fierce. I was almost too angry to reiterate my thankfulness that this was her wedding-eve.

Yet I was persuaded, all the while, that her arts had not availed to draw my betrothed, by so much as a hair’s-breadth, from his allegiance to me. The injury was in the fact that she had attempted to win his admiration, and, I assumed, his homage. I have learned since to question if woman or man who is secure, with confident, joyful certainty, of his or her hold upon the heart of another, *can* be jealous. If the reader has been tempted to smile at the simplicity of girlish vanity with which I regarded Ronald’s gift of the peach-blossom ribbons and Christmas silk, and Uncle Ronald’s marvellous additions to my wardrobe,—and to write me down a very poor creature indeed, that my heart beat tumultuously and my tears gushed freely over incidents which a sensible heroine would not have thought worthy of record,—I pray him to remember that I was all along haunted by the consciousness, sometimes dimly, oftener distinctly acknowledged, that I was greatly—I feared in my morbid moods, immeasurably—Carl’s inferior. I had his heart. My

faith in that never wavered, or my own heart would have broken. But I wanted him to admire me as well as love me.

There is a lust—it surpasses longing—for beauty and for the appliances that heighten beauty, as a good light and tasteful frame make the merits of a fine picture patent to the most careless gazer;—a passion that leads to spiritual deterioration, if not to moral ruin. There is a craving for these quite as intense which is blameless and even praiseworthy. I would have struck off my right hand that night (this is not hyperbolical!) to feel that my charms of person and mind had given me a hold upon my betrothed that no adverse influence could shake. I wanted him to find in me his other and perfect self, from whom his thoughts could no more separate themselves than he could shake off his individuality.

Over the pensive visage reflected in the glass presently flitted a melancholy smile, full of longing not many removes from bitterness.

“I can understand how the poor little white cat in the fairy-tale could urge the prince whom she loved, to cut off her head and throw it into the fire that she might spring from the ashes to his arms, a beautiful young princess!” I said aloud. “Yet he loved the little white cat very dearly already!”

I sat down in my semi-bridal attire in Carl’s chair, and tried, in honest impatience, to reason and chide myself out of what I called “a fit of doldrums,”—a species of attack which was becoming far too frequent with

me to accord with my views of right and gratitude. I reminded myself how lately I had averred that I was the happiest of women, and that there was literally no cause whatever why I should change my opinion. Carl loved me as truly as ever. He had never been more affectionate to me than at our parting. I had urged him to make the Wyanoake visit as strenuously (or endeavored to do this) as I had that to Leighton, a year ago. I was rich in friends—passing rich in presents. The variety of finery I had heaped upon myself to-night would have made me jubilant on the evening when I had wrought merrily at the discouraging bits of napless velvet and washed ribbons in the attempt to “get out” a decent bonnet. If I could be light-hearted then, why was I downcast now?

The room was very cold, and I drew my costly shawl closely up to my throat. The Wagner mansion was ablaze with light at this hour. Roaring fires were on every hearth, and jocund voices resounded through the rooms that used to be so grand to my childish eyes. If it were possible for me to walk into the great parlor, apparelled just as I was, now, would Carl be proud of me? Would he feel one thrill of exultation in presenting me to his friends as his promised bride? He would be very glad to see me there, or elsewhere—but I longed to know, if it were but for one minute, that he was fully and rapturously *satisfied* with his choice. Assured of this, I would not care how long he lingered at Bella’s or Rosa’s side; how musical he thought their voices, how “witching” their eyes.

Pshaw! I had reasoned—if reasoning it could be called—myself around to the point from which I started. I was weary, overwrought with much sewing and excitement. I would read my nightly chapter here, in Carl's own room; say a prayer for him where he knelt to pray for me, morning and night, and betake myself to my own quarters. I took up a Bible from the table, and noticed, as I had not done in the morning, that it was one which Carl usually carried in his pocket. He had probably forgotten it in the hurry of his going. I thought that strange, too, for it had been his companion for years. I opened it with very gentle fingers, and a glow, such as his personal presence might excite, stealing through my chilled frame and heavy heart. Something dropped into my lap with the unclosing leaves. It was a little old "book-mark," worked on perforated cardboard, and mounted upon blue ribbon. The card-board was limp and yellow, the silks with which it was embroidered were faded, but I knew it at once for one I had worked for him five years ago, and sent to him in a letter on his birthday. I had used my brightest gold thread to give lustre to the rays surrounding a Maltese cross worked in gilt beads. Thread and beads were tarnished into blackness. The accompanying inscription was—"TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH."

It was likely that I had been led to draw his attention to the text by nothing more than a notion that it might encourage him in his work as a publicly accredited ambassador of the Master. It is certain that I had

at that date very dubious ideas as to the enemies and obstacles to be passed by him before the reward was given. Now I paid slight heed to the inscription. My whole soul was moved and melted by the knowledge that he had treasured the worthless memento; that I was, even then, beloved and fondly remembered.

Oh! the wealth of the heart I had won! the stainless truth and constancy of him whom I called "lord!" For very shame of my ungrateful discontent, my groundless presentiment, should I not beat down the besetting devil of suspicion that was poisoning my prosperous life and grieving him into disappointment?

I promised it to God and to myself, then and there.





CHAPTER XXV.

ESTHER.



AYSIE," said Ronald, turning a laughing face upon me, "did not you tell me that Miss Rosa Wagner was to be married on the 26th?"

We were at a social reunion of Sabbath school delegates and other guests, more or less distinguished, given by Ronald's church on the second day of the jubilee convention.

"Certainly I did!" rejoined I, surprised. "Why do you ask?"

The lady with whom he was conversing said something to him in a low tone, and he brought her up to the nook from which I was surveying the gay scene.

"Miss Brainerd—my adopted sister, May Hedden," introduced Ronald; adding, smilingly: "You have heard me speak of her so often that you should need no formal presentation. May, Miss Brainerd will tell you how mistaken you were!"

"Another lesson in the fallibility of human testimony, however conscientiously given," said my new

acquaintance, lightly. "Yours is the right to the first hearing. You believed that Rosa Wagner, and not her sister, was to marry Mr. Atlee. Why, may I inquire?"

"I remember now that nobody exactly asserted it in my presence," answered I. "But I took it for granted from the facts that I met Rosa and Mr. Atlee together at a concert, last Winter; that she introduced him, significantly, as I fancied, as her 'friend,' and that their whole bearing was that of persons who were on more than friendly terms. Meagre details, you may say, but they seemed sufficient to me to warrant my conclusion."

"Others fell into the same error, and the sisters enjoyed mystifying the public. But Mr. Atlee is now Bella's husband. I was one of the bridesmaids, so I can speak with authority," smiling again, in a frank, engaging way, that made me think her very handsome, whereas I had previously only pronounced her face intelligent and spirited.

"I knew the Wagner family well when I was a child," I remarked. "I have seen little of them since. The wedding was a brilliant affair, I suppose?"

"Very gay. And although the bride and groom left Wyanoake yesterday by the same train that brought me as far as Mereton, there were decided indications that the festivities had hardly reached their height. There are, I think, fifteen guests in the house who are to stay over New Year's Day, and fresh relays of what Susan Nipper would term 'temporaries' are expected daily. There are sleighing-parties, hunting-parties, skating-

matches, and other winter sports projected, besides indoor and fireside enjoyments."

"I wonder you could leave it all so soon," I said, innocently, and so earnestly that my companion looked keenly at me before replying.

"I should not have gone to Wyanoake at all, but for a promise made years ago to Bella, that I would act as her bridesmaid whenever she should need my services. I was much more interested in what was going on here. I regret that I missed the first day and some of the best speaking. And fashionable weddings are the same everywhere—in this country, at least. I don't believe that I was born with a bent for gayety of that sort—certainly not for protracted *fêtes*. It is wearisome and profitless labor, this trying to make a train of gunpower burn so many hours or days. The need of continual replenishment of the supply of combustibles, the play of the machinery that regulates the *feux de joie*, are so palpable that the effect ceases to be pleasing after a while."

Ronald, who had been withdrawn from us a few steps by the exchange of salutations and friendly inquiries going on all about us, now approached.

"May I share in the discussion of that ancient but ever entrancing theme—'What the bride was dressed in'? I will be very humble, very teachable, very patient!"

"Slander!" we cried, in a breath. "When we have not spoken, or so much as thought of it!"

"Ronald," I added, solemnly, "I am afraid city life is making you cynical and uncharitable."

"Ungrateful!" subjoined Miss Brainerd, in reproach as solemn. "When I was about to chant the praises of your *fidus Achates*! I had heard much of Professor Cromer from different members of the Wagner household. He is a favorite with them all," she continued to me, Ronald having been seized upon by some fresh arrivals. "I was, therefore, prepared to like him, but hardly to admire him as cordially as I was obliged to do after an hour's conversation. He informed me that I would find you here, on my return, and this was but one of many agreeable things he contrived to say to me even on the wedding-evening. Mrs. Wagner charged me with a dozen affectionate messages to you, most of which you are, in turn, to bear to your mother. The dear old lady could not speak of her without visible emotion. She still recalls the Hedden Hegira as one of the most dolorous eras of her life."

"She was always very kind to us," I replied. "I believe her attachment for our mother was deep and strong. I think, at times, that I should like to re-visit Wyanoake—but *incognita*. I have a perfect picture, mellowed by time, in my mind, of the old church, the Parsonage, the woods, meadows, and mountains. I mean to make a pilgrimage, some day, to the church-yard."

Miss Brainerd's look and voice were softer and graver.

"Mr. Cromer told me that your own mother was buried there. He was going to visit her grave the next day—that on which I left. This I learned from Mrs. Wagner, who was saving flowers and evergreens for

him to take with him. She was made very happy by the discovery that one of her guests was distantly related to your mother. I do not know that she would have been favorably impressed by him but for this circumstance, for there would seem to be little in common between the two. But his name—Van Coyne—was a passport to her best graces. She had a long talk with him about family matters and his cousin, Mrs. Hedden, with whom I think he said he was not personally acquainted.”

“The name of the Van Coynes is Legion,” said I, secretly intolerant of the digression. “I will write to Mrs. Wagner and thank her for the beautiful token of respect paid to the precious dust. For dear and precious it is to me, although my mother died at my birth.”

“So I have heard. Forgive me for speaking of a matter so sacred, here and now!” leaning forward to screen my face from general observation. “I thought you would be happier for knowing how fondly you are remembered by your absent friends, and that the beloved dead is honored for your sake. And please bear in mind that I have a right to talk freely to you. Your brother-cousin, Mrs. Wagner, and Mr. Cromer have taken care that we should not meet as strangers.”

Ronald made another effort to change our duet into a trio.

“I am very glad you have seen Cromer; very grateful to you for your quick appreciation of his rare excellence,” he said to Miss Brainerd. “I owe more to

him than to any other living man. I account praise of him—discriminating praise—a favor done to myself.”

I was content to let them chat uninterruptedly for a while ; sat well back in my niche—a window-seat converted into a deep recess by a bookcase on one side and a mantel on the other—and delighted myself with the nourishing morsel served by this true woman’s hand.

Carl found time, amid the bewildering revelry of the season and occasion, not only to think, but to talk of me ! He had promised me, voluntarily, to see my mother’s grave, and that it, with the lesser mounds in the “Dominie’s lot,” was well and neatly kept. It solaced my weary heart—weary with homesickness for his presence and the assurance of his love—to learn that he honored this mission as a loving and pious pilgrimage. There was ineffable sweetness in the thought of the flower-bestrewed mound adorned by his hands. I forgot the pain that had pierced me like a sharp, fine needle upon learning that Rosa Wagner was yet unmarried ; forgot that I had been ready to accuse her of double-dealing and sorcery, and to suspect Carl of passive complicity in her scheme of deceiving me and fascinating my lover. If I retained any recollection of the pang and the doubts that caused it, it was to condemn both.

Thus stayed by reflection and resolve, I entered zestfully into the wholesome pleasure of the evening. As Ronald’s sister, I was the recipient of marked and cordial attention. As marked, and, if possible, more wel-

come than this, was the notice paid me by several old friends of Papa's, who greeted me warmly in his name. I was listening to one of these—an eminent divine from a distant State, who, although slightly deaf, atoned for the infirmity by sparing his fellow-colloquist most of the trouble of talking—when my attention strayed entirely from him, tempted by the sound of Ronald's name uttered close to my other ear. Seated just before me were two elderly ladies—strangers to me.

"Maybe she don't know her mind yet," said one, mild-looking, plump, and fair-haired, to her crony, who was bony, erect, sharp-nosed, with frizettes, black, shining, and rigid as horse-hair, beetling over her forehead.

"Esther Brainerd has known her own mind about everybody and everthing since she was two days old!" retorted this iron dame, contemptuously. "Depend upon it, she is not at a loss about this matter, whatever the rest of the world may be. She understands where she is, and what she is about, and what she is going to do, and when the time comes she will see to it that others know—just as much as she chooses to tell them!"

"And you really think she prefers Mr. Hedden?" queried the plump lady, insinuatingly.

"I didn't say so!"

"But it looks like it—don't, it now? her hurrying back from the wedding and leaving Mr. Wagner there—his cousin's wedding, too! and the whole family ready to eat her up, they think so much of her—on purpose to be here to-night?"

"She is a great one for Sabbath-schools!" observed Frizette, demurely. "'Tisn't for us to judge of her motives. As for her actions, they may be intended to blind the wise-acres."

The mild lady winced.

"Of course, it is none of my business; but I can't help being interested in a popular girl, who may become my pastor's wife. But she would do well to get either of them. They are both nice gentlemen and talented ministers of the Gospel. And any man would do well to win her. She is a fortune in herself."

"For all that—if you'll excuse me for speaking pretty plainly about our young pastor—I don't believe Mr. Wagner would be so eager in the chase, if she were not the only daughter of a rich man. He doesn't disdain the good things of this life."

"Who does?" interpolated the gentler dame, for which timid dissuasive she was incontinently snapped up.

"Did I say there was any harm in it? He's a smart man who knows on which side his bread is buttered, and a prudent one who doesn't throw away powder and ball when hunting. Otis Wagner has as shrewd a head as ever his rich uncle had. It isn't in the power of Fate to toss him high and hard enough to hurt him or knock him out of shape. He would keep his eyes open and his wits about him, and contrive to alight upon his feet in a soft place. He was born to rise, and he knows it. I have been acquainted with him since he was a boy—know him through and

through. Not that I don't consider that our church has done a wise thing in calling him. He will cut a broad swath in Mereton ; carry everything before him in the pulpit and out. But he is a Protestant Jesuit. Only, he ranks his own interests higher than those of this or any other church. If he runs a tilt with Mr. Hedden for the favor of—"

Here instinct warned me that *my* reverend attendant was nearing the end of a sentence embodying a question, and I had to hearken in truth as in seeming. When he became again the narrator, I had lost some connecting links of the more interesting dialogue going forward on the other side of me, and was unable to comprehend many of the fragments that drifted to me.

"Rich, and has travelled all over the world. Childless, too !"

"Has taken a prodigious fancy to him. May make him his heir."

"He was a terribly wild fellow in his youth !"

"That was a long time ago"—this from the milder gossip. "His attachment to a minister of the Gospel looks well. Mr. Wagner took him to the wedding, you know."

"What if Miss Rosa were to make a conquest of the fascinating elderly gallant—become an old man's darling ?" suggested the iron woman, sarcastic as respected the Wagner *penchant* for the solid riches of this present world. "Papa wouldn't mind balking his beloved nephew's expectations, if his daughter could

catch the gold-fish. Although, if report is to be believed—and there is usually *some* truth in every report—the pretty heiress has her eye on a younger man. A clergyman, too!”

Miss Brainerd was speaking to me, and I was maliciously diverted to see how the brace of church-womanly gossips started and even fell guiltily apart at sound of her fresh, clear voice.

“Miss Hedden, your brother is kind enough to promise to spare you to me to-morrow. I shall call for you early—say about ten o’clock, that we may have a long morning ride—and keep you until evening. Don’t object, please! You can have no idea how much it costs me not to have my own way when I have once set my heart upon anything.”

I could not help smiling at her tone and the fact that her late critics were still within hearing. They would have a choice bit to report, touching her intimacy with Ronald’s relatives and her determined will.

“I had not thought of objecting,” I said. “I like my own pleasure too well for that. I accept the invitation as frankly as it is given.”

Ronald would make me come into his study that night, after we reached his boarding-house. It was warm and bright, and I was tired out by the unaccustomed gayeties of the day and evening. He put me into a cushioned chair in front of the fire, took off my wrappings, set a cushion for my feet, and kissed my forehead in brotherly fondness.

“I was very proud of my sister to-night!” he said,

warmly. "I couldn't let you go to bed until I had told you how much I am enjoying your first visit to me, and had thanked you for behaving so charmingly to my friends. Especially for your cordial response to Miss Brainerd's overtures of friendship and evident appreciation of her society. It has been a cherished wish with me that you should like each other."

His voice was very soft and full of feeling. Without glancing at his face, I knew what was coming.

"I love her, Maysie! Please God, I mean to tell her this some day soon!"

"I hope—I believe that you will be very happy together," I managed to say, through the choking flood of mingled emotions. "She looks good and noble."

"She is all that is noble, true, and lovable,—a brave, deep-hearted woman! She would grace a throne or glorify a cottage. Happy! I cannot trust myself to think of the happiness that would be mine, could I hope to win her. I am not worthy of her, Maysie!"

"If you are not, what is Otis Wagner, who is your rival?" I had nearly said, but I kept it back.

Something in his unaffected humility, his enthusiastic enumeration of the virtues of her he loved, set a chord to jarring in my heart, and the vibrations caused me exquisite pain. One woman, then, could be sure that she reigned supreme, beyond the possibility of rivalry, in her lover's affections and also in his imagination. Carl had not spoken in this tone when, in his twilight talk with his most intimate friend, he had called me "the dearest child in the world;" and Ron-

ald—my kingly brother—rare and admirable as were his merits, deserved no more abundant portion of happiness than did my betrothed. Could it be that I was defrauding Carl, that it was not in me, or one like me, to sound and to fill his heart? Oh! was this boding fear to follow and torment me forever, that it should return, and with force, so soon after I had bidden it begone? What did all this mean? Were these the unwholesome fantasies of a foolish girl's brain—or warnings I would do well to heed?

"Dear, dear old Ron!" I cried, covering his hand with tears and kisses. "She ought to be very proud—very glad to have won *you*!"

"A poor prize at the best!" answered his deep, sweet voice, still borne down by its weight of feeling. "But such as it is, it is all hers—now and ever! I have never loved another woman; I shall never see another who could be to me what she has been for nearly a year. For I loved her the first time I ever saw her. I might not have said a word of this to her for many months more, but for Uncle Ronald's arrival. He will live with the Mother now, and although far from being even moderately wealthy, he will not accept the home she offers, unless he is allowed to pay her fairly for his board and lodgings. He is able to do this, and will take two of her best rooms. I had not thought that the right to love freely and openly and to plan a home of my own would so soon be mine. I thank the Father with a full heart for the priceless boon."

"So good a son and brother could not fail of his reward," I interposed.

"Don't say that, dear ! If I show forth the fruits of love to those who love me, what thank have I ? The Mother should be served with all gladness of devotion. And Maysie, we, of all people, ought not to fall into the habit of regarding temporal prosperity as a token of the Master's approbation. Else, where were the lesson of His Son's thirty-three years of poverty and self-abnegation ? If earthly weal were the seal set upon His own, our dear father would have been one of the great and fortunate ones of his generation, and the Mother would not now be the ill-paid keeper of a students' boarding-house. There would be no need for the assurance—reiterated in so many forms, lest the faith in the final good should be downborne by the sight of the present evil—"The Lord knoweth them that are His," if the stamp of proprietorship were easily recognized and readily honored by mortals. Nevertheless, should He vouchsafe to me a direct answer to my prayer for Esther Brainerd's love, I shall praise Him with joyful heart and lips. If not—I must endure hardness—maybe become the better soldier because of it."

"But don't you think people, even Christians, are better for being happy ?" I ventured to bring forward my pet theory. (Did I hold it up thus continually as a shield against obtrusive dreads of disaster ?) "I never love God so well as when He has given me the desire of my heart. Indeed, Ronald, I have never

been able to see why He should demand of us a service so unreasonable as thanksgiving for misery."

"Happiness—true and eternal—is our birthright, dear sister. The world can no more take away than it can give it. It is human to shrink when the sharp cross is laid upon the shoulder. Although, even then we may avoid a fall into despair by remembering Who sank fainting upon the rough stones of the *Via Dolorosa*. But all the digging, pruning, and grafting needful for the trees God would set by rivers of living water must be done in this present crooked world. There is no purgatorial or punitive process in reserve in that which is to come, for the children of His love. This thought has helped me to bear and to comprehend much that might otherwise have shaken my trust in His wisdom and tenderness. Viewed in this light, does not the touch of affliction bear a wondrous likeness to the brand of the Shepherd upon the choicest of the fold—those He would not willingly lose? It is a mark to be respected by the powers of evil as of good; and exemption from sorrow is a token that may well make the ungodly afraid."

It was odd that the conversation should have taken this turn, for Ronald was not given to private sermonizing. I sat, silent and somewhat awed, watching him as he spoke, looking absently into the fire, his thoughts seemingly far away from me. It was an unexpected digression from the lovely rhapsody with which the talk had begun.

He may have had a like thought, for he presently turned a very sunshiny face upon me.

"We have studied in the Mother's school to little purpose, if we have not learned that nothing really ill can befall us. If we cannot see the way for tears, it is the merciful blindfolding of our sure and tender Guide, when He would lead us over dangerous passes, the sight of which would drive us mad. Ah, Maysie! if we could only believe this always!"

I was alone in Mrs. Sibwright's parlor on the afternoon of the last day of the year, trying, as I thought, to read comfortably and lazily over the fire, enjoying the selfish luxury of the contrast between the cheerful room, well-furnished, crimson-curtained, and warm, and the lowering heavens and muddy streets visible from the window nearest me, when the door-bell pealed loudly through the house. I had just time to recollect that in the temporary absence of my hostess I must entertain the visitor, when Esther Brainerd entered.

"This is a pleasure!" I began, in a tone of delighted relief, for we were very good friends by this time.

Her awe-stricken face—the great pity in her eyes—her gesture in coming toward me—prepared me for some terrible revelation before I saw that she held an open telegram.

"The Mother?" I asked, falteringly "Or"—for this was no season for bashful reserves—"is it Carl?"

She replied by giving me the paper.

It was directed to her and signed by Mrs. Wagner. The date was "Wiltfield. 2 o'clock, December 31st."

"Carl Cromer is dying. Bleeding of the lungs. May Hedden must come to him."





CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW I WENT BACK TO WYANOAKE.

IF I state very briefly the events of the next few hours, it is not because each one is not stamped clearly, and for all time, upon my memory.

Ronald had gone to the metropolis to keep an engagement with his uncle, and would not return until eleven o'clock that night. Mrs. Sibwright might not be in till tea-time.

"My father's carriage is at the door," said Esther Brainerd, in answer to my distracted look. "Knowing that your cousin is out of town, I made my arrangements, so soon as I received the telegram, to accompany you, if necessary. A train leaves for Wiltfield at five o'clock. It is now half-past four. We can drive to the depot in five minutes. Let me help you!"

She got me ready with noiseless celerity that awoke in my stunned brain a gleam of admiration; left a line of explanation for Mrs. Sibwright; sent off a telegram

to Mrs. Wagner, on the way to the dépôt ; had me, with my trunk, in the cars, and flying northward in the gathering glooms of the December day, before I could utter a word of acknowledgment. Not that I was bewildered ; that I did not comprehend in all its dread certainty what had happened ; what awaited me at the end of this sudden journey.

Before we left behind us Mereton, with its busy streets, and flaring furnaces, and bristling steeples, I seemed to have known always that Carl Cromer was dying, bleeding to death, and that May Hedden, his betrothed wife, must come to him. The May Hedden of one week ago, pricking her prosperous soul with causeless queries touching the possibilities that another woman, fairer, richer, more sprightly than herself, might win an approving glance from him whom she—fickle and foolish—had promised, so lately, to trust forever,—this child, weak, exacting, and fretful, had shrunk out of sight and existence before the thought of what we were hurrying onward to see. The awful grief was already a part of my life ; had interfused every current of thought and feeling. I could sooner have ceased to breathe through sheer forgetfulness than have ignored for a second what had overtaken me, or to lose sight, for one moment, of the minutest feature of the calamity. Esther Brainerd had put me on the inner side of the seat, and had placed herself by me in silence she did not offer to break, or invite me, by look or sign to end, until the thick darkness pressed close to the window by which I

sat, and the red rush of sparks athwart my eyes, bent mechanically upon the outer scene, was like the streaming mane of a meteor flung abroad over hill, river, and gorge.

We were half way to Wiltfield, and were halting, for wood and water, at a country station, when I said—indistinctly, for the dry choking in my throat and chest was agony—"I wish I could thank you!"

Her bare hand—firm, and so warm that I felt the healthy glow through my glove—closed upon my icy fingers..

"Don't try! I know all you feel—all you would say! Reserve your strength, and we will both pray to the dear Lord, who doeth all things well, to remember our infirmities."

Simple words and commonplace, but through them, and her quiet eass, the strong soul of the woman took hold of mine and kept me from drowning in the great flood of waters.

It was pitchy dark, and fine, piercing spray—rain or mist—was beginning to fall from the clouds, when we got out of the car at Wiltfield. Esther accompanied me into the ladies' room at the dépôt, set a chair for me near the fire, and left me for ten minutes, which seemed like so many hours. There were only two other ladies there, and careless of remark, unable to sit still, I walked up and down in a fever of restlessness. For all this while, "Carl Cromer was dying. Bleeding at the lungs." And "May Hedden must come to him."

Esther reappeared with an apology. She knew—none better—what every minute was to me.

“I had hoped to find Mrs. Wagner’s carriage waiting for us,” she said, “and to get later intelligence. But she did not get my telegram. I found, by inquiry at the office, just now, that they do not send dispatches out of town so late in the day. I have engaged a hack to take us to Wyanoake.”

Not one land-mark in the once familiar road and scenery was visible during our drive, had I been sufficiently collected to note it. The patter, at first drowsy, then rapid, of the rain on the carriage-roof, the lunging to and fro, over mire and stones; the indistinct talk of the driver to his toiling horses; the “stuffy” smell of the cushions in the close carriage, and the no less sickening odor of the wet leather curtains; the occasional gleam of the lamps at each side of the driver’s box, upon wet tree-trunks and boughs and muddy ruts,—these are all the impressions I retain of the outward circumstances of that tedious, fearsome journey.

All—except the warm, encouraging hold of Esther’s hand upon mine, and her few questions as to my bodily comfort. What I felt and dreaded during each minute I shall never forget, and never describe. I recollect putting myself in mind, once, when we had been a long while on the way—as I might another person who was heedless or abstracted in mind—that we must soon pass the church and parsonage, and resolving to look out for them when I should

guess that we were nearing them. I might be able to trace the outline of the spire, and there would be lights in the parsonage-windows, if the present pastor and his wife worked hard and late as the Mother and Papa used to do. I did not bethink myself again to watch for either. The abrupt halt at Mr. Wagner's door was like the fall and jerk of the pulley to the victim lashed to it. I sprang up with a stifled cry; clasped my hands convulsively. Esther put her arms about me now.

"He knows your frame, dear May! Relief or strength will be sent. This is His promise, and it is a sure mercy!"

She supported me from the carriage and up the piazza-steps, which were dripping wet, the rain streaming fast and noisily from the roof—and no one appeared to greet us. The front door was shut, but not locked. Esther did not pause to ring. With the air of one entirely at home on the premises, she turned the bolt and went in. A gentleman who was crossing the hall looked back at sound of our entrance, and at the blast of damp air that followed us.

"Esther! Miss Brainerd!" said Otis Wagner, in extreme astonishment. "Can this be you?"

"How is Mr. Cromer?" she asked, without hesitation; feeling, as she afterwards told me, explanatory of her bluntness, that I was trembling violently, and unable to endure longer suspense.

"Rather more comfortable!"

A dizzy, far-off sense of floating, like one in a dream

—he is yet conscious *is* a dream—swept over me, from my brain to the feet that refused to uphold me. I did not swoon. They thought I did, as they laid me on the hall-sofa, for I heard Otis say,—still like one a great way off from me :

“My aunt told me to-day of her belief with regard to their engagement. But it seemed incredible to me.”

“It is true!” was all Esther’s answer.

She was kneeling by me, bathing my hands with cologne, while, eyes closed and teeth clenched, I fought with the mortal sickness paralyzing tongue and limbs.

Mrs. Wagner and Esther stayed with me. I heard them order others away, and felt the mother’s old friend kiss me sobbingly.

“Poor lamb!” she said. “It’s a mercy she’ll see him alive and conscious. He’s some quieter and easier to-night. He’ll be better still, I hope, when he hears you’ve come, May, honey!”

Full strength returned to me with the words. I stood up, straight and sensible.

“I will go to him at once, if you please, Mrs. Wagner! Unless you think it best to prepare him?”

“I think it best to prepare *you*!” said Esther, with a faint show of raillery. “You would startle him were you to go in as you are! He would not recognize you.”

She took me up to Mrs. Wagner’s room. How well I recollected the mammoth curtain bedstead, the huge mirror-doors of the wardrobe, and the turreted fire-dogs I had, in childish ignorance, mistaken for gold.

A servant brought me a cup of hot tea. Esther removed my bonnet and cloak, bathed my face and brushed my hair. Finally she kissed me; bade me "thank God and take courage," and still with her arm about my waist, led me across the upper hall to a door without which Mrs. Wagner stood beckoning to us.

"Be *very* careful!" she whispered to me. "He must not talk or be excited. Don't let him see how anxious you are!"

She admitted me cautiously, and shut herself out.

Carl's eyes were fixed upon the door as I entered. He put out his hand feebly; smiled as I leaned over and kissed his pale forehead. But he did not offer to speak. His breath came hard and irregularly. He was ghastly white in the lamplight. If the accounts I had had of his condition had been less discouraging, I should still have seen death in his face. But seeing it, I could speak calmly and tenderly,—for had I not "come to him;" looked again into his living face?

"I have come to take care of you, dear Carl. I am your little wife, you know!"

I liked no other pet name so well from his lips, but I had never before called myself by it in his hearing, or in that of any mortal.

A hectic flush touched his cheeks; his eyes sought mine, irresolute, imploring; were closed for an instant, and a solemn, peaceful look fell upon his countenance. His hand was laid upon my head.

"Amen!" was his whisper, and all was still.

If he had never spoken again; if he had died then,

I should still have considered that we were married, really and in truth, from that hour.

I watched him until midnight, seeing the light burn lower and lower in the sinking eyes, the ashy shadows settle gradually about the lips. Yesterday, I had measured our united lives, in anticipation, by years. When I dared trust myself now to peer into the horror of darkness stretching on every side, I saw them narrowed down to hours; foresaw the nearing hour that would be counted out avariciously, minute by minute.

The storm rushed down the northern gorge, to break upon the house in maddest fury, as the two doctors—a country practitioner, and a man of greater note from Wiltfield, summoned in consultation—paid their fourth visit to the sick man.

Mrs. Wagner came in with them and drew me into the adjoining chamber. There was a roaring fire in the chimney, a lamp on the table; books and papers were scattered on the chairs and floor, and the scent of lately burned cigars was everywhere.

"This is my winter sitting-room," remarked my hostess. "But Otis uses it as a study when he is with us. He won't be up until after the doctors have made their report. He is very unhappy, like the rest of us, about our poor, *déar* Carl. At least he must be, although 'tisin't his way to show feeling on any subject. But we have known Carl so long, and loved him so dearly, as everybody must! Lie down, my child!" gently forcing me back on the lounge. "And you must really hope for the best. I met your blessed

mother in the city, last Saturday—her and Felix. What a man he's grown to be! I shall always be sure there was a Providence in it—our meeting, I mean—for if I hadn't insisted upon her dining with me at a restaurant, while Felix was off attending to his own business, and we fell to talking about our families—and so on, you know, and—well! I was led to ask her straight up and down, if Carl Cromer was engaged to be married, that she knew of, and she said he was, and to who. But she said, too, your wish was not to have the affair talked of, yet a while, and I didn't breathe it to a soul, only to my Rosa, as I asked your mother's permission to. Well! The young people were gay as larks, Sunday evening, singing hymns round the piano until ten o'clock. Rosa says that was it, but I shall always believe he took cold walking on the piazza with her afterward, while they were heated, going right out of the warm parlor! Though they weren't there long, and only went to look at the northern lights over Roundtop Mountain. But he *was* chilled; real blue and pinched-looking, even to his lips, when he came in, and coughed more than once while he stood warming his hands at the fire. I noticed it then, and 'twas the first thing I thought of when Otis knocked at my door, at four o'clock next morning, to say that Carl had burst a blood-vessel in the lungs. That's the whole story, dear; all except that you are always more than welcome here, and how sorry I am this has happened."

She was bustling about, clinking cups, saucers, and

plates, and now brought me a waiter of refreshments.

I turned my head away.

"I am much obliged to you, Mrs. Wagner, but I cannot eat a morsel."

"Tut! tut! you must keep yourself up for Carl's sake, you know," remonstrated the distressed monitress. "I'll set it down here, on the table, and you'll try to pick a bit presently. Watchers always need a lunch during the night. Coming!" to a servant who opened the door. "Be quiet, dearie, till I come back. You shall have the first news—never fear!"

Wearily relieved by her absence, I shut my eyes, and tried to pray for guidance and strength. My prayer was lead, that would not rise; that dropped crushingly back upon my heart. My lips moved while I prayed, but it was mechanical and incoherent action. Most people, used to the habit of prayer, become unconscious formalists at such moments, forgetting in their distraught ravings, that their mighty woe is in itself a sufficient appeal to the tender and pitiful Father.

"*Dear Lord!*" I once heard a Christian woman cry, when grievous tidings were brought to her. And with that, she laid her mouth in the dust. No vain repetitions, no extempore eloquence of supplication or resignation! Only a child's cry from out the darkness to Him whom she could feel, if she could not see.

As for me, undisciplined, affrighted, quaking with misgivings of that which was yet in store, I forced my

tongue to frame pious periods, and hearkened with breathless intensity for sounds from the next room. A slight noise nearer to me caused me to open my eyes. I started to a sitting posture, in actual terror, on beholding, within a few feet of my lounge, a gentleman standing with his hands behind him, regarding me fixedly. I knew him instantly. It was the stranger I had talked with twice, and seen, six years later, in the city restaurant, on that most memorable birthday.

He took the initiative promptly, in the present interview.

"Miss Hedden, I believe!" he said, in the blandly languid tones I remembered so perfectly. "I should beg pardon for the intrusion, but at a time like this friends may waive ceremony. And by virtue of my former intimacy with your mother (I refer to Mrs. Hedden) I may claim to be considered your friend. My dear young lady, I would assure you of my sincere sympathy with you in this very distressing extremity, and advise you (still by virtue of my friendship for your mother) to pay no regard to selfish counsellors, or to the prejudices of well-meaning but weak friends. I would entreat you, in whatever exigency may arise, to heed the dictates of common-sense and your own heart. It is always wise to make provision for the future. This may sound cold and hard to you, in your present state of excitement, but you will see the propriety of the advice when the shock of bereavement—should this be inevitable—shall have passed away."

Was he crazy? Was I sane? Did he speak in a

oreign tongue, that the words were, to me, utterly without meaning?

I had not moved; was staring in a maze of bewilderment, that doubtless looked to him like semi-idioty, at his impassive face, when Esther Brainerd entered hastily. Her eyes flashed at sight of my companion.

"I take it for granted that you were ignorant of Miss Hedden's presence in this room, or you would not have disturbed her," she said, haughtily. "As my errand to her is important, may I ask you to leave us for awhile?"

"With pleasure!" was the suave reply, delivered with a bow of profound courtesy. "And may I, my dear young lady"—to me—"ask you to bear in mind my *disinterested*, and, I am persuaded, sound advice?"

When we were rid of him, Esther knelt down before me; held me in her arms of comfort and strength, while she told me two things.

The physicians had said Carl could not outlive the night.

And when this was told him, in answer to his direct inquiries, he had requested that our marriage should take place immediately.



CHAPTER XXVII.

JOINED TOGETHER.

IF I were reading the story of another's life, I should censure as improbable the statement that any woman—tempted, tried, and shocked as I had been for eight hours—could, in the supreme moment that ended suspense by quenching hope, be actually alive to passing events, observant, through no volition of her own, of the most trivial incident.

“I noticed nothing in the extremity of my anguish.”

“I was stunned beyond the power of seeing or hearing what was going on about me.”

These are phrases people repeat, parrot-like, because others have used them already and so often that they are accounted “the proper thing in the circumstances.”

Yet nobody doubts the stories we are told of the marvellous quickening of the drowning man's brain.

It was Esther Brainerd who walked with me into the chamber, where the whole family was collected,

with guests and physicians, to witness the strange ceremony. Mr. Waguer and his wife were on one side of the bed ; Esther remained on the other, but a little withdrawn from me, after she had seen me lay my hand in the cold, almost pulseless one, that moved slightly to meet it. Prominent in the background of faces was that of my late self-appointed advisor—his eyes gleaming with real satisfaction. I wondered—being “unnaturally composed”—at what, and why he should have interested his elegant self at all in my affairs. Otis Wagner stood at the foot of the couch—graceful, self-possessed, impressive. The modulations of his voice were perfect, and coupled with the apt and pathetic language of his exordium, brought tears, in great measure, from some eyes.

I felt no inclination to weep. My heart—(did I have one?)—was dead or petrified, but my brain was on the alert,—clear, prompt, swift in perception and deduction,—reminding me—so completely was I mistress of memory and all reasoning faculties—of what I had read of the tongue ; viz., that the surface of it is made up of ends of nerves. I did not believe that Otis Wagner felt one tithe, nor one thousandth part of what his trained tones and facial muscles contrived to express. In any other mood I would have shrunk from his agency in the awful and sacred act that bound me for time and for eternity—(such was my rendering of the vow)—to the only man I had ever loved, whose had been the first place in heart and thought, for ten years ; who, I was assured, would never see the dawn.

of another day. I bethought myself of my unconquerable distrust of, and aversion to, Mr. Wagner's nephew; chided my mean spirit that I did not long for Ronald's presence and priestly offices.

"I do not care!" answered my stilled heart and dormant instincts. "Why should I? One man will do as well as another, so far as the outward ceremonial goes. It is but affixing the seal, after all."

"Whom, therefore, God hath joined together, death itself shall not put asunder!" pronounced Otis, with telling emphasis.

I, who was gazing steadfastly at Carl, saw his eyes stray suddenly to some one who moved forward, at that instant, to a place at the clergyman's elbow, and mine followed to Rosa Wagner's face. She was deathly pale, but passing beautiful. Her hands were clasped; her head bent a little forward; her lovely eyes, dilated with intense feeling—horror, love, yearning—looked a piteous farewell into those of the dying man. I felt his fingers quiver convulsively, then drop from mine, and the whole room was in confusion.

"He has gone!" cried Mrs. Wagner, in shrill distress.

The Wiltfield doctor pressed to the front and kept back the crowd.

"He has fainted!" he announced. "Clear the room immediately, Dr. Payne!"

Me they suffered to remain. My hand it was that held the cordial to his lips, as he revived, and no other ear detected the significance of the moan,—laden with

such dreary, hopeless longing!—that marked the return of conscious emotion.

“Rosa! Rosa!”

Only that! But, as by a flash of daylight, broad and vivid, let into a darkened chamber, I saw all!

How he had loved this beautiful, accomplished, and fascinating girl, secretly and passionately, perhaps hopefully, until he was persuaded that she was betrothed to another; how the declaration, extorted from me by threatening death, had wrought upon his kind heart and nice sense of honor, and urged him to the proposal which, as I now, for the first time, reflected, contained no avowal of his affection for me. How he had resolutely kept aloof from Rosa, and made himself believe that he was content and happy in our engagement, until the invitation to attend her sister's marriage, and pass a week under the same roof with her, proved too strong a temptation for his pleading heart. Pleading, I could well imagine, for one more sight of the fair face; one sound of the wooing, cooing voice, I, her miserable rival, could not deny was singularly musical.

I saw it all!—the continual conflict between duty and inclination that had torn his soul during this fatal gala-week; his struggles in the toils *I* had helped to weave! Be sure I did not forget this, and that no thong in the scourge stung more sharply! His inability to leave her side and seek comparative safety in flight; the crisis when she had told him—walking beneath the stars and the mysterious shimmer of the

“northern lights”—of her mother’s discovery of his betrothal to me, and the catastrophe that betrayed the violence of the conflict, the depth of his despair.

He had married me, while dying, as he would have married me had life and health been spared, because his honor and his knightly word were pledged to this, but his heart was in revolt all the while.

My poor, poor Carl! So strong and yet so weak! Strength and weakness that had combined to work my enduring woe; to doom me to years of futile self-reproach and remorseful memories!

“Speak to him!” ordered one of the doctors. “He may recognize you.”

I cowered back where he could not see me, were he to open his eyes.

“No!” I said. “I cannot!”

In my humiliation of spirit I prayed that he might never recognize me again. How could I endure the intelligent gaze of the eyes I had misread so wilfully and so long? I bore his name. I was his wife now. I should soon be his widow. When, if the secrets of our souls were laid bare, it would be seen that we were nothing to one another,—less than nothing. While I stood by his pillow and ministered unto him, I was a usurper and a deliberate cheat. That other woman whom he loved as I loved *him*, should be there, of right. In the name of Christian charity and of humanity,—in the name of meagre, common justice, how *dared* I keep her away? Yet what could I do? The least breath of excitement might sever the thinning

thread by which his life hung. Or, if this risk were less fearful, she would not take a place to which she had no legal claim. Her friends would not permit it. The suggestion would breed ferment and scandal. Things must remain as they were. I could never ask him to forgive the irreparable injury I had done him, the wreck I had made of his happiness and life—I, who would have died for him! He must pass the dark river without hearing how sincere was my desire to serve him, how poignant my repentance for my blindness and folly. Gagged and impotent, I must accept the place of honor in the ghastly farce to be played out by my darling's death-bed.

My darling? Never, never that! never to be! It had been good for me—and Oh, how good for him—if I had never been born!

I had thrown myself into an easy-chair, and bowed my shamed face within my hands. I could not stay by the man I had wronged. Still less could I quit his presence and leave him to draw his last breath in peace, on the bosom of her who should be his wife, instead of myself—marked for misfortune from my very birth! I am afraid I upbraided the Lord who made me for sending such a wretched, foredoomed waif into His world.

“My dear madam!” said the Wiltfield physician, touching me, and speaking in a subdued key, “you really must endeavor to bear up! Your fortitude, up to this time, has been beyond praise, and the sight of your agitation might be attended with the gravest re-

sults. Mr. Cromer is reviving, and he will miss you. Let me beg of you to return to him. We count upon the effect of your presence as a remedial agent."

I followed him to the bedside, took the seat he designated. Mrs. Wagner stole in on tiptoe. Esther Brainerd was visible through the door, which was ajar—watchful and sympathizing. Nobody spoke after the doctor ceased whispering to me.

The storm waxed more furious without. I remembered how the same north-wind had battered at the Parsonage windows, and shaken the lowly roof-tree, the night after Harry's death. Why had He whom I had been taught to believe gracious and pitiful; whose mercies were over all His works; who knew

"More of human need
Than all my prayers had told;"

who had respect unto the lowly; whose child I—"the foundling"—had called myself—why had the wise and just Father spared me and taken away the noble boy, the mother's youngest-born? He had a place in life, a name and a home.

Dead silence reigned in the apartment for at least an hour, for Carl had fallen into a light slumber, and the lifted finger of the physician enjoined absolute quiet. From my chair, I could see the motionless outline of the figure upon the bed—I dared not look at his fast-changing face. Mrs. Wagner had mounted guard opposite me in sorrowful vigil. Esther Brainerd had glided in, and seated herself in the shadow at the

back of the room. The Wiltfield doctor, who meant to watch all night with the patient, let himself down cautiously into a chair close to the hearth, and warmed, first one hand, then another, at the blaze. There was nothing for me to do, but "hold still" and suffer. Once in a while, words of prayer formed themselves in my mind, as they had done while I awaited the verdict of the consulting physicians. Their purport was very different now. Carl had no reason to fear death. Life would be bondage in the fetters of a distasteful marriage.

"Yet how I loved him! how I loved him!" my torn heart would cry, raising a feeble guard against the chastening that had beaten it prone to the earth, as a child's puny arm, uplifted, might deprecate, but could not ward off the rod.

And still the descending deluge thundered upon roof and walls and a solemn hush brooded within the sick-room. The fire sank low, and some one—I think it was Esther—laid on more fuel. The patient stirred and sighed, almost awoke, and the ready anodyne was put to his lips. He drank, and slept again.

Three o'clock! A time-piece in one of the lower rooms told off the strokes in a metallic chime. It was New Year's Day. The year in which I would be twenty-one had begun. I had violated my promise to the Mother in marrying during my minority; had caused her to fail in her pledge to the dead. Ah well! it mattered little to the living or the sainted—to any one except myself—this hollow form of wedded union.

The sin had been in my betrothment to a man who would have married me because he pitied me for loving him so fondly. A heinous transgression, if this were the punishment consequent upon and justly proportionate to it.

At four o'clock, Carl awoke, spoke more distinctly than at any other time since my arrival. The words did not reach me, but the physician turned in my direction.

"He asks for you, Mrs. Cromer!"

I put out a hand involuntarily to check him.

"Don't call me *that!*" I said, impulsively. "The name doesn't belong to me!"

Carl beckoned me to put my ear to his mouth.

"The name is yours, May! it and all else that I have. I have not much to give you, my poor, faithful girl!"

"I know all about it!" I returned, hastily, believing that I read an enigma in his words. "But I deserve nothing, ask nothing, except your forgiveness!"

It was dangerously indiscreet, but I could not restrain it. I said the words lowly and slowly that he might understand me, and that others might not.

"Forgiveness!" he echoed, in the same weak whisper as before. "I should crave that from you. But, indeed, I never meant—"

He began to cough, and the doctor interposed with stricter injunctions to silence.

"There is a rally of the vital forces," he said, with authority. "One that may prolong his life for hours—possibly, for a day or two. But a return of the hemorrhage would frustrate all hope."

He was doing his best to avert this. Even my unpractised eyes took note of the skill and earnestness. Three hours more of silent watching, and New Year's Day dawned through sweeping rain, and low, dense clouds that filled the valley from mountain to mountain.

At nine o'clock, a carriage covered with mud, drawn by a pair of steaming horses, drove up to the front door. I was just opening a shutter in Carl's room, as the occupants sprang out. They were Ronald and Carl's uncle, Mr. James Cromer.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARAH.

IT was the afternoon of New Year's Day, and Carl was still alive. At noon he had rallied decidedly; had greeted his uncle and Ronald with marked pleasure, and, sending every one else out of the room, had a private interview with each of them. Then Ronald would take my place at his friend's pillow, "that I might sleep off my fatigue in some measure."

The habit of obedience to him was too strong for me to oppose the affectionate mandate. I allowed Esther to undress and lay me on a bed in a darkened chamber; thanked her for the wish that I might rest quietly and awake refreshed, and when she had withdrawn, remained as she had left me,—eyes staring achingly at the blank ceiling, while my ears were pained by the throb of the stillness that shut me in;—silence, in which my excited senses could detect a measured beat and surge like the voice of the distant sea.

Esther came for me, according to her promise, at

the end of two hours. Sister's hands never ministered to sister's needs more tenderly than did hers to me. She combed and braided my long hair, each stroke of the brush soothing as a mesmeric pass in quieting the pain in my head. There were warm water for my batli and fresh clothing laid out for me, and I was suffered to do very little in the work of the toilette. She wearied me with no superfluous talk. Her taciturnity and her dexterity were alike remarkable. She did not speak of Carl after telling me that there was no perceptible change in his condition. But her exceeding pity and love seemed to encompass me like a wholesome, bracing atmosphere. But for it, I have sometimes thought that reason would not have outlived the crucial test of that day.

"Your ways remind me of the Mother's," I said, when I was ready to return to my post.

"If I had done ten times as much for you, that one sentence would make me your debtor," was her reply, gratefully uttered.

I was alone with Carl when, about four o'clock, he asked to have his pillows shifted, that his head might be higher. I slipped my arm behind his neck, in order to do this more easily and successfully.

"That is pleasant!" he said, almost in his natural voice. "I breathe far more comfortably. Leave your arm where it is for one minute, please! May! my little wife!"

The last word was spoken lingeringly, with emphasis I would once have believed was loving.

He dozed for an instant, rousing with a start, and his weak hand crept up to my face.

"Poor little one!" in the same clear tone. "Faithful unto death!"

I could not answer except by laying my cheek to his. My years of devotion, without calculation of what I might gain or lose by loving him, seemed to make him mine just then. When I raised my head, I perceived that he was sleeping again more soundly than before. The sedative administered by the physician, a while ago, was doubtless taking effect. I could not move, if I had desired it, without breaking the friendly spell. I was only too thankful to support the precious burden; to dream—let the chimera be never so short-lived—that I was his chosen and well-beloved wife, whose was the right to hold him thus to her heart and guard his slumbers.

The house was almost painfully still. Every foot that trod the upper and lower floors was slipped; and even Mr. Wagner was schooled by his wife to speak in whispers when nearing the sick-room. The very fire burned after a subdued fashion. There were bubbling bursts of sap and flame, like muffled thuds upon an unresonant surface, instead of roar and crackle. The wind had gone down, and the rain fell straight upon the piazza-roof,—a slow and lulling patter. These were all the sounds I heard for half an hour. Carl slept peacefully. I was glad to feel the weight of his head recline more and more upon my arm, showing that his rest was becoming profound.

His breathing was no longer labored; his chest arose and fell gently as that of a sleeping babe. Then the door of a closet at the side of the chimney creaked sharply. Immediately afterward, voices and footsteps were audible from the adjoining apartment—Otis Wagner's *pro tempore* study. I surmised, at once, from my familiarity with similar architectural peculiarities in other old houses, that a long closet ran from room to room without intermediate partition, and that both doors were set ajar by a sudden current of air, probably caused by the unclosing of the study door.

"I have taken the liberty of appointing an early interview, Mr. Hedden," said a bland voice I knew, "because I foresaw that, in the too probable event of your friend's speedy dissolution, a conversation of any length between us might be unwelcome to you, if not impracticable for other reasons."

"I am at your service for the present, Mr. Van Coyne," returned Ronald, courteously, but rather coldly. "Although I can form no plausible conjecture as to the subject of the proposed conference."

"You may when you understand who I am. Your honored mother is my cousin, once-removed. I was the friend of her early girlhood; to be frank, her rejected suitor. Had she reciprocated my attachment, life had been very different with us both. Perhaps but regrets are useless, whether for her or for myself! She had been your father's wife for six years, when I wedded a younger, but not a fairer woman,—Mrs. Hedden, as I need not remind you, her son, being

the one in ten thousand whom Solomon failed to find."

This airily, and accompanied, I could easily imagine, by one of his inimitable obeisances.

"I had lately returned from a long sojourn in foreign lands, when I met your revered grandfather's ward, your mother's adopted sister, Miss Farley—"

Ronald's abrupt movement in rising to confront the narrator was audible to me, in the deep stillness where I leaned on Carl's pillow, not venturing to call out or stir, to apprise the speakers of my proximity.

"Impossible!" he ejaculated, in deep, stern tones. "You cannot be Warren Van Coyne!"

"Excuse me for the contradiction, but that unworthy personage is before you!" responded the other, unruffled and urbane.

"The Warren Van Coyne who abused the confidence of his benefactor, Maud Farley's guardian, to win her affections! who eloped with her and never allowed her to communicate, by word or letter, with those who had been the best friends of her orphanage! who basely deceived and deserted her!" went on Ronald, with growing vehemence. "The man who, his acquaintances believed, died in South Africa fifteen years ago!"

His companion laughed softly.

"An absurd blunder on the part of my acquaintances, for which I should not be held responsible! I am a cosmopolite. I fancy that I may have been an Arab in a former state of being. The world has

given me many homes. That in America is, perhaps, the least congenial to me. But to resume my story, of which you have, I perceive, had a garbled version. I married Maud Farley against her guardian's will, as you have said. Other, maybe better, men have done the like when tempted by Cupid or Mammon. I installed her as mistress of an establishment suited to the magnitude of our united fortunes; introduced her to the gayest society of the gayest city of the South, and would have made her happy but for her insane jealousy, and the preposterous resolution begotten by this. Returning home, one day, in the second year of our wedded life, after an absence of a week, I found that she had fled—whither, no one could or would tell me. In her place was a woman of common birth, uneducated and underbred, whose always coarse beauty had overblown into—excuse the blunt, English word!—*blowsiness*, downright and irredeemable. Faugh! it sickens me to recollect how she met me! I had known her some years previous to this delightful surprise, while spending the hunting season in Scotland, and my then susceptible imagination was captivated by her peasant comeliness. She had presented herself to Maud, in my absence, leading her child by the hand, and, by the display of a plain gold ring, with my initials and date on the inside,—which I had, to humor her prejudices, given her when at the height of my folly,—a letter or two, and the boy's face—he did look like me and was a handsome rascal!—by sighs and tears uncountable, convinced my wife that her claim upon

me was prior to her own, and legal. Maud's was a proud, high spirit. She was a petted and passionate child—just twenty years old, and comparatively new to the fashionable world and the ways thereof. But these circumstances cannot excuse her extraordinary plot for disgracing herself with me. She introduced the Scotch peasant to my servants as their lawful mistress; surrendered money, keys, and all the jewelry I had given her to the impostor, and, without leaving a line of farewell for me, forsook my house and me forever. She was the deserter—not I!”

“No pure, right-minded woman could have remained under your roof after such a discovery!” interposed the younger man, warmly.

“This is an extract from the code according to which she was reared!” rejoined the other, apologetically for the obsolete platitude. “Most wives as luxuriously established would—whether pure-minded or not—have made a fight for position and reputation. All efforts to keep up virtuous and decorous appearance was rendered futile by her rash action. I made a swift clearance of the audacious Blowsabella. I offered to have the boy educated and taught a respectable trade, if she would leave him, but she would not hear of it. When convinced by my asseveration, and that of my confidential lawyer, that her Scottish marriage was not valid in this Christian land, since neither magistrate nor parson had assisted at the rite, she went back to her native Highlands, I paying her pas-

sage and making a liberal donation towards the maintenance of her boy.

“I did not pursue Maud. Of her own will, she had put silence between us. It was for her to break it. Within six weeks after her flight, I had sold house, furniture, slaves,—everything I owned in New Orleans; converted most of my fortune into ready money and foreign securities, and taken a state-room in a European steamer. Two days before she sailed, I saw in a New York paper a notice of the death, at the residence of Rev. Felix Hedden, Wyanoake township, of ‘Maud Farley, adopted daughter of the late Evarardus Van Coyne, Esq.’

“I did not revisit America in twelve years. My effort to see your mother and thank her for her kindness to my misguided wife was foiled by your father’s sudden death. I would not afflict you by recapitulating the incidents attendant upon that tragic event. To be frank with you again, my main design in visiting her was to ascertain if Maud’s child were alive, or if it had ever been born. That it had died in early infancy, I learned, as I supposed, from a prim little girl, with a red spot upon her cheek, who called herself May Hedden, and spoke of the deaths of two other girl-babies the same winter in which she was born. But for this information, and her declaration that she was Mrs. Hedden’s only daughter, I should have remarked her likeness, despite the blemish of which I have spoken, to Maud. The resemblance was very strong when I encountered her casually, a year since,

in a city restaurant,—so startling that my earnest gaze put her to the blush. When I came to Wyanoake to Miss Wagner's marriage, my name led to a catechism on the part of our worthy hostess as to my pedigree and contemporary relatives, and from her valuable communications, I was soon *au fait* to the history of 'dear Mrs. Hedden's family;' learned that my legitimate daughter had survived a sickly babyhood, and was known to the world as my cousin Katherine's own child."

"Her mother died, believing her illegitimate!" Ronald said, in just and irrepressible wrath. "Died accounting herself to be no wife, and giving, with her last kiss to her worse than orphaned babe, a name that should tell you something of the bitterness you had entailed upon her and your child. The infant was baptized 'Marah,' at her mother's death-bed. She would have it so."

"A proceeding, which, you will grant, was in wretched taste, however Christian the letter and spirit of the ordinance may have been!" sneered the elder man, openly. "It was like Mrs. Hedden's fine sense and delicate tact to soften the objectionable name to 'May.' Pardon me if I prefer now to dismiss all reference to the irretrievable past and proceed directly to the business in hand. Your interesting young friend, Mr. Cromer, is rapidly approaching his end. I am sceptical as to natural affection. In point of fact, I scout the theory of its existence, *in toto*. And other affection I could not be expected to feel for one with

whom my actual acquaintanceship hardly deserves the name. But justice, conscience, and—if you choose to assume that I am not superior to such influences—the prejudices of education urge me to pay some heed to the future of this young person whom he has married. You are impatient” — as Ronald made another restless movement, and uttered an exclamation of disgust;—“I will be brief. You have great influence over your dying friend. Use it to induce him to make his will, and to provide properly for his widow. You owe this to her, you being (as is generally supposed) her nearest male relative. You also owe it to yourself. Her unlucky disfigurement greatly narrows down the chances of her contracting a second marriage, and she is not, I take it, gifted or brilliant. She may seriously hamper your future movements, should she remain dependent upon your family.”

“My sister can never be anything but a joy and a solace in my home!” Ronald said, proudly. “Allow me to imitate your frankness so far as to disabuse your mind of the apprehension that she will ever draw upon your means—(made up though your fortune is, to a great extent, by what belonged to her unhappy mother!) for a single penny. She belongs to *us*—wedded or single! Carl Cromer, knowing all that we then knew of her antecedents, freely chose her for his wife, and even won from my mother the promise that May should not be told of the shadow overhanging her birth until after her marriage, lest her sensitive honor might impel her to refuse her hand to one upon

whom no such stigma rested. I am thankful that neither he nor she will ever hear, if I can help it! that which would be a darker blot—the disgraceful fact that she is *your* daughter!”

The door of the study was reopened—I could not tell whether from within or without, but the rush of air from the colder hall blew the closet-door shut, and all was still once more. I drew a long breath; and for a blind, horrible second, my life seemed to shudder away from me. My limbs were numb; wild bells rang maddeningly in my ears. But for the weight—grown very heavy by now—of Carl’s head upon my arms, I must have fled away into the storm, to escape the eyes of those who knew the story to which I had unwillingly listened. Meet the man whom I loathed but the more since I had learned what was his relationship to me, I could not. He had murdered my mother. He had blighted my life. Such a tangled, warped, misshapen life I saw it to be! “Elected unto misery!” I had read or heard the phrase, somewhere, when it seemed a slander upon the All-Father. I snatched at it desperately now as the solution of what was else all a revolting mystery.

“Elected unto misery!” It should have been added to that sad and hasty baptismal service. I would direct that nothing else should be inscribed on my gravestone.

Carl’s head had sunk gradually on one side until his cheek lay on my breast. With a vague instinct—I was not capable of thoughtfulness—that the position

was not comfortable for him, I put my hand under his face and raised it, slowly and with exceeding care, lest I should disturb his slumber.

And then I saw that I could never disturb him—sleeping or waking—again.





CHAPTER XXIX.

FACE TO FACE.



TOOK a sudden resolution that night, lying alone by my own wish, in a chamber remote from that in which Carl had died.

He was not the only one wronged by his marriage to me. I would tell Rosa Wagner what I knew, and ask her pardon. I had no pride to sacrifice in forming this purpose, and my dislike to the girl seemed to have died with it. I convinced myself that I owed it to Carl's memory as well as to her to make what reparation I could for the evil I had dealt. And it was all I could ever do for him. Whatever might be my recollections of his great goodness to me, his chivalric tenderness to one whom he loved but as "the dearest child in the world"—(how the phrase I once loved to repeat stung me now!),—whatever the depth of my remorse for my own folly of blindness,—I could never confess my fault to him, or hear him say that he forgave me. What if Rosa, whom he had loved, who must, through that love, have been elevated into a higher sphere of thought and feeling, than I had imag-

ined her capable of reaching,—what if Rosa should forgive me in his name ?

I felt strangely strong as I arose to my feet ; thrust my feet into slippers, girded my dressing-gown about my waist, and knotted up my hair. I must have had a fainting-spell earlier in the evening, for my hair was wet and there was a strong smell of hartshorn in the room. But my head was quite clear and steady now. My limbs did not tremble as I walked across the room. I looked at my watch. It was ten o'clock. Just five hours since I lifted Carl's heavy head and discovered that he did not breathe. I held the watch in my hand for two or three minutes, deliberating whether it was not another part of my duty to resign it to Rosa Wagner, since the gift was, in some sort, a renewal of a betrothal that never ought to have been. Then I put it into my bosom, thinking that I would be guided in action by the revelations of our interview.

"Come in!" said Rosa's soft voice, when I knocked at her door.

Her's was the chamber lately occupied by the two sisters, and was more luxuriously furnished than any other in the house. She sat by the fire, wrapped in a blue peignoir, buried in the depths of an easy-chair, her long, fair hair loose upon her shoulders. She mistook my knock for that of her mother or a servant, for she did not glance up from the book she held until I stood close to her. I had time to note how very beautiful she was in her becoming undress ; to see a silver basket of grapes and bananas on the table at her

elbow, even to read the title at the head of the page, before she turned a leaf and raised her eyes to the intruder's face.

The color rushed to her temples; she uttered an exclamation of amazement and affright, and sprang up, tossing "*Aurora Floyd*" under the table with a dexterous sweep of the arm.

"May! Miss Hedden—Mrs. Cromer! what has happened? Are you ill? What can I do for you?"

"Only listen charitably and reply frankly to what I have to say to you!" I replied, taking the seat she brought forward. "We ought to understand one another before I go away, and I may not have another opportunity of speaking privately with you."

"I will give you a dozen opportunities—to-morrow, next day—any time! You can make your own appointment," she interrupted, eagerly. "But indeed, this is hardly the place or season for agitating talk. You are not strong enough—you are looking wretchedly. Do let me persuade you to go to bed!"

"I am strong," I said. "Entirely composed. And there is no time like the present. I wanted to speak to you about Mr. Cromer's peculiar relations to me, and his sentiments with regard to yourself."

"Don't! don't" she implored in accents of real distress, putting her handkerchief to her eyes. "I am half-crazy about it all now! I am so nervous that I am really afraid to go to bed. I knew sleep would be an impossibility, and I had determined to sit up all night. I dared not think; so I forced myself to read

something that would distract my thoughts for a little while from—from—what has happened. Don't be harsh with me, May! I had known him so long—they used to tease me about my tall sweetheart when I was still in the nursery—and I got into the habit of expecting to be noticed and waited upon by him. All girls like admiration—as much of it as they can get—especially from gentlemen, and you know I had always been accustomed to having everything I wanted.”

“Yes!” I responded, calmly. “I know!”

“So it went on after I was grown, with little or no thought on my part of anything serious, until the day we all went down to Old Harbor to hear his inaugural. He was the lion of the occasion, of course, and he was so handsome and animated—I never saw him appear so well at any other time—that I could not but be flattered at his choosing to sit by me and talk to me instead of with the distinguished men who sought him out to offer their congratulations.”

While she talked, faithful—cruelly faithful memory was painting another scene for me. A girl, attired in a calico wrapper sitting upon the floor, in the September sunshine, pricking and abrading her fingers with the embroidery of a coarse gray rug, and dreaming her own visions about him who was speeding towards her and home. Yet I did not lose a word of Rosa's story.

“I suppose I did encourage him rather decidedly. At least Bella, who was always a little prudish, said so. He asked permission to write to me now and then. I

said he might, if he wouldn't make his letter, too heavy with learning. His first was all well enough, and I answered it in a friendly, sprightly strain. In his second, he came directly to the point—"

I put out my hand, involuntarily.

"There! I understand! And this you answered also—and definitively?"

"I told him that I esteemed him more than I did anybody else in the world—so much that he might have hoped much from the possible growth of that feeling,"—Rosa went on, evidently interesting herself more and more in the narrative as it grew into a tale of love's triumph,—“but that my father would never hear of my marrying a clergyman, and had in fact set his heart upon another match for me.”

"Was that true?" I interrogated.

She looked startled—almost afraid of me,—then recovered herself with a slight, coquettish laugh.

"Oh! as to that, there is hardly ever more than a flavoring of truth in young ladies' letters of rejection. We do all we can, conscientiously, to ease the blow, you know. But my father *is* ambitious for his daughters, although we would be apt to do as we liked in marriage, as in other things. I said, moreover, what *was* true,—namely that I had no vocation for the life of a clergyman's wife; that I was much too frivolous, too fond of gayety and my own ease; that there had been moments when I felt myself capable of better things, especially when in his society; that association with him had done me good first and last, and how wretched

I would be if I thought this were to be the end of our friendship. I needn't bore you with particulars. Such always sound flat to a third person. You must have had the like disagreeable task to perform yourself, sometimes, and cannot blame me for trying to spare his feelings as far as I could."

There may have been a gratuitous insult in the last smoothly spoken sentence, but I would not see it.

"I never had but one offer of marriage," I said with grave conciseness. "That was from Mr. Cromer. It is a relief to my mind to learn that your prior claim was distinctly disposed of before this was made to me."

I had unintentionally touched her vanity. Her eyes flashed, and she laughed again—now with an accent of disdain.

"You didn't suppose—"

She checked the rest, but I replied as if the sentence were complete.

"I suppose nothing derogatory to Carl Cromer's honor. That must always have remained stainless. I imagined nothing worse than that his intention of addressing you was reversed by his belief—in which I shared—that you were already engaged to be married."

"He did believe that for a while—indeed, for several months. But, as I told him afterward, it is never safe to take things for granted. Bella and I went abroad last summer, our main business being the purchase of her trousseau. So I did not see Professor Cromer for an age, until we met him accidentally, a few

weeks ago, on the street. I saw that he was agitated, and I confess I was not altogether displeased at the discovery—I beg your pardon!” stopping again, and in apparent concern at her inadvertence. “I am shockingly forgetful to-night!”

“You have no occasion to ask my pardon,” I rejoined, with deadly composure.

I can call it nothing else. But for that one stab of pain when she would have recapitulated the contents of Carl’s love-letter to her, I might have believed that sentiency was utterly gone from my heart.

“As I told you in the beginning, I desire and intend perfect frankness,” I continued. “It is no news to me that he loved you better than he did me.”

“Oh! I wouldn’t go so far as that!” she returned with polite patronage that seemed to me more unfeeling—following, as it did, my humiliating avowal—than anything that had preceded it. “But, you see, I was really very glad to see my old friend again, and, woman-like, gratified that I retained some hold upon him. And, recollect! I had not a suspicion of your engagement. If I had, my course would have been very different. As it was, I told him honestly that I had missed him dreadfully; had been unhappy at the utter cessation of our intercourse, and begged him to come to Bella’s wedding. Your brother was walking with her, so we had a few minutes for private talk. He refused at first, peremptorily—haughtily, I thought, and I must have shown that I was hurt, for he apologized for his bluntness, but repeated his refusal.

‘I see how it is!’ I was driven to say at last. “‘You have not forgiven me. I did not think it was in you to hold a grudge so long. I am disappointed in one whom I was proud to call “friend!”

“That went home, for he turned pale, and said nothing for a moment. Then his voice was very low and husky, but he was perfectly courteous and gentle.

“‘You are mistaken!’ he said. ‘If I had anything to complain of, I forgave and tried to forget it, long ago. There was never any grudge.’

“‘I shall not believe it,’ I insisted, ‘unless I see you at the wedding.’

“And I reminded him of the happy days we had spent together in this dear old homestead.

“‘I have not forgotten one of them!’ he said so mournfully that I laughed.

“‘You speak as if you regretted that you ever had them!’ I said. ‘The next thing will be that you wish you had never seen and known me! I would not have believed that you were so fickle!’

“‘There are different ways of viewing what you would term inconstancy,’ he answered, stiffly.

“But I could not make him promise to attend the wedding. Naturally enough—(are you quite comfortable in that high chair? I should feel so much more at my ease if you would take that *causeuse*!) Naturally enough, I say, I determined that he *should* come. Please don’t forget that all this while I had not a thought of his obligations to you, and being piqued by his reserve and stateliness, I took more pains to accom-

plish my end than I should otherwise have cared to do. I made my cousin Otis write for him by persuading Bella to insist upon Esther Brainerd's acting as her bridesmaid. A wheel within a wheel, you see, for you must know that there is a decided *tendresse* between those two—Otis and Esther. And I must say, even at the risk of appearing ill-natured, that he could hardly ask for a more encouraging symptom of her disposition toward him, than her coming back here, just now."

"She came to take care of me," I affirmed, but without temper. Where was the use of attempting my friend's defence? She needed none to those who knew her as she was.

Rosa shrugged her shoulders and lifted her eyebrows.

"*Peut-être!* But we have nothing to do with her motives. My mother was easily induced to send one of her affectionate, ill-spelt epistles to her old favorite, begging him to make her happy by a visit. So he came. But he wasn't half himself. I suppose now that he was far from well, although he never complained. I fancied then that he was trying to steel himself against me, and had resolved that matters should not drift back into their former channel. Naturally (again) my spirit was thoroughly aroused. It was a novel sensation to me to be crossed, or—as I put it to myself—to be defied by any man. I *did* try to break through the barrier he had raised. Any other girl, spoiled by admiration, and fond of making conquests, would have done the same. I like now,—(although you may not believe it

—nobody gives a girl who has any pretensions to belle-ship credit for having one grain of honorable feeling)—I am glad, now, to remember that I did not succeed in making him anything more than friendly. I had rather know, really—since he is dead—that he was true to the letter of his engagement. I couldn't face you so coolly if this were not true. I want you to believe every word I say about this. I couldn't deceive you at such a time as this, you know."

"I have not doubted that he respected his obligation to me," said I, with dull emphasis. "He was incapable of trifling, much less truce-breaking."

"I am afraid I caused him a deal of needless pain," she resumed, pensively, and, it was easy to see, convinced within herself that she was altogether candid and humane. "It distresses me to think of it. If he had only been sincere with me, much might have been spared to us all. I always contend that the straightforward course is the safest in the end. As it was, he was marked in his avoidance of a *tête-à-tête* until that last evening—I mean that on which he was taken sick. I had been very angry with him all day. My mother went to town on Saturday, and met yours. And in the course of their gossip about family affairs, it came out that Professor Cromer had been engaged to you for ever so long—a year at least. Poor Mamma was in a 'state' about it when she came to my room that night, almost disposed to blame her model man for his reticence, entirely disposed to give me a sound scolding for my outrageous 'flirtation,' yet, withal, terribly un-

easy lest my affections should be really engaged. Who could tell what mischief I had done? was the first head of her lecture. She could not tell what mischief had been done to my virgin affections, was the second. I suppose you, as a member of a clergyman's family, set your face like a flint against fibs of all complexions. It seemed to me a very white lie with which I soothed the dear soul. I told her I was privy to Professor Cromer's engagement, and that there was a thorough understanding between us; that I had never dreamed of marrying him—(the flavoring of truth again, you see)—and that she might seek her pillow and sleep the sleep of just and scrupulous maternity. But I was *awfully* angry for all that, as I have said, and took no pains to conceal it from the cause of my righteous indignation. He looked surprised, at first, at the change in my manner, then pained and uneasy, and that night, when I went out alone on the piazza, he followed and asked how he had offended me.

"I did not spare him. I am sorry to remember it all now, but my mortification at having been duped, hurried me on to say what had better, for both our sakes, have been left unspoken. He uttered never a word until I had finished my harangue, when he said, very sorrowfully, and, I could not but own, very dignifiedly—'I have never deceived you wilfully, Rosa. Even if I were not bound by my word to another not to make public my engagement, I had no reason to suppose that the knowledge of it would interest you particularly. I was invited to Wyanoake upon the ex-

press condition that I should come as your *friend*. I am grieved that I have displeased you, but I cannot see wherein I have been in fault.'

"I called him a 'heartless trifler' at that. You are horrified, doubtless, but I was fearfully out of humor, and I knew how Otis and Mr. Van Coyne, and the rest who had seen us together during Christmas week, would enjoy the story of my having wasted time and pains upon an engaged man. You must admit yourself that I had reason to be annoyed."

"It all sounds very strange to me," I said, slowly, and beginning to feel bewildered.

As indeed everything seemed. And nothing more strange than that I should be sitting in that balmy, luxurious chamber, opposite the woman who looked so fair, and talked so fluently and lightly after the shock of my entrance passed away, and that we were discussing, step by step, with apparent coolness and without passion, that which had ruined my life's happiness, and murdered him who lay stark and cold but three rooms off. My hands and feet were very numb, and now and then an odd chill settled about my heart, when its beat intermitted for a second or so. But my nerves were obedient to the command of the will; my brain retained its unnatural clearness, except for the transient bewilderment I have mentioned. And I knew, all the while, without one merciful lapse into incredulity, that Carl was dead, and that he had never loved me with a warmer love than a brother's.

"And well it may seem strange," responded Rosa,

with ready sympathy. "I can hardly persuade myself that it is not all a dream. It is a real relief to talk the affair over. I shall sleep the better for getting it off my mind. Well, that is about all of it, except that he was excessively shocked at the way I ran on. I could see this, although he continued silent while we walked two or three times up and down the piazza. Then he said—'Heaven help us, if what you say be true!' To tell the truth, I haven't an idea of what I *had* said, I was so fretted. And after a moment's pause, he added—'We had better go in. You may take cold.'

"I was nettled at that too. It sounded shamefully unfeeling, if not insolent. In the height of my vexation I burst into tears and rushed away to my room, while he went back to the parlor. We never spoke to one another again. I did not see him until Mamma, with an eye to appearances, would make me go to see the ceremony, you know. I refused flatly for some time, but she protested against my absence, as the certain cause of so much ill-feeling and unpleasant surmises and pity knows what not of scandal and impertinence, that I was fairly worried into going. I was completely unstrung by the sight of him, and the thought of how we had parted in anger, and, I dare say, behaved like a little fool, for Esther Brainerd looked at me severely with her big gray eyes, and Mr. Van Coyne rallied me afterwards upon 'my theatrical *pose*.' I have controlled myself tolerably since then, and I am amazed to find how composedly I can talk to you to-night,—but it is undoubtedly the reaction after excitement. No-

body can have the most distant conception of how much I have had to bear."

"How much you have had to bear!" I echoed, weighing each syllable. "Yet you never loved him? Never fancied that you did?"

"Decidedly not!" emphatically. "It was quite out of the question. He was never my 'style'—excuse the slang, but it expresses my meaning. We wouldn't have snited one another in the least. Not that he was not too good for me in many respects, but—well, you must see why it *couldn't* have been."

"I see!" responded I. "Then, my errand to you is finished. I thought, if you were really attached to him, I would make known to everybody the truth that you, and not I, should have been his wife. I would beg your forgiveness humbly and penitently, for having supplanted you in seeming—only in seeming—for a little while. I had no suspicion until after the ceremony—(that is the only word for the empty form)—how things were with you and him."

"He told you, then?" with unfeigned interest. "What was his version of the story?"

"He did not name you to me. I drew inferences which, it appears, were only too correct, from your countenance and his emotion. If he had spoken freely to me five minutes before he fainted, I should not have now need to sue to you for your pardon. As it is, my future conduct with relation to the matter shall be regulated by your wishes."

"For mercy's sake, my dear creature, don't get up a

sensation! There's not the least necessity for saying anything about it. Nothing damages a girl's prospects so much as to have a story of a disappointment from any cause bandied about concerning her. This has been a miserable business, and the sooner it is forgotten, the better for all parties."

"Then I will trouble you no longer," I said, rising with difficulty, for my numbed limbs were reluctant to stir. "I am sorry I interrupted your reading."

"Don't speak of it, my dear," briskly patronizing. "As I told you, I was only reading to kill time and drown thought. If I have been of the least comfort to you, I am delighted. Do take some fruit before you go!" offering me the silver basket. "You look fagged out, and no wonder! Or, perhaps, you would prefer more solid refreshments? Mother will be sure to send a cup of her cure-all, hot tea, to your room before you sleep. Can't I do something for you? No? Then good-night; I *hope* you will rest well. I am *so* glad you dropped in."

She stooped to pick up "Aurora Floyd" before I closed the door behind me.

Had the same God made her—this girl with the angel-face and inch-deep heart,—who fashioned the high and delicate spirit she had played to his death? I did not believe in any God that night. But neither did I consider the creature of shams and shallows I had just left, a beautiful devil. I had hated her a week ago. Now, I could think of her with simple weariness.

She was an insignificant figure in the tragedy I was living.

As I stepped into the hall, I saw Mr. Van Coyne and Otis Wagner walking on ahead of me, the latter carrying a lamp, and evidently escorting the guest to his chamber.

"I am sorry you will be obliged to breakfast at such a barbarously early hour," he said, hospitably. "But there is no help for it, if you are bent upon leaving us."

"There is no expediency in my remaining longer," was the answer. "I shall see you in the city soon, I suppose. I avoid funeral scenes from principle and constitution. May I charge you with my adieux and condolences to Mrs. Cromer? I made them in person to the other ladies."

"It will be a great comfort to get this affair over," said Otis, candidly. "It is a very unfortunate *contre-temps*."

I slipped, unobserved, down a cross-passage, out of the sound of their voices.





CHAPTER XXX.

“MEN AS TREES WALKING.”

CARL had, in his interview with Ronald, asked that he might be left in Wyanoake.

“Bury me by May’s mother,” was his request of his almost brother. “I shall rest as sweetly there as anywhere, rise as surely in the Resurrection-morning. And you know, Ron, dear old fellow, that I have no home of my own on earth.”

He may have had a hope he would not own to himself, that Rosa would sometimes visit his grave, lay flowers there as he had upon the mound that hid my mother from my sight,—flowers that were scarcely yet withered. In the latest flickering of mortal desire, there may have come alluringly to him the thought that her eyes must fall, Sabbath after Sabbath, upon the lonely heap rounded over the heart that had loved her to the end, in spite of expediency, in spite of honor; against his conscience and against his will.

Or—for he was ever modest to a fault—he may have shrunk from the thought of the parade of a public

funeral—the mummerly of processions and addresses—in Old Harbor or Leighton. This latter was Ronald's explanation of the expressed wish. This and his love of all connected with me. He had spoken most tenderly of me in committing me to his friend's care, so Ronald related with faltering voice and tearful eyes.

"He thought you would not object to his choice of a burial-place, Maysie, dear," he added. "If you do, all shall be as you will. This was his own proviso. He was mindful of your slightest preference to the last."

"Let it be as he directed," was my answer. "It is best and right."

We laid him quietly at the left of the so long lonely grave in the southern corner of the "Dominie's lot," piled the black, wet clods upon the bravest and gentlest breast that ever swelled with compassion for others' woes, and offered itself, a broad and ready shield, for the protection of the weak and defenceless.

I had handsome monuments erected above him and my mother, the next summer, and set a snowy headstone above Baby Harry's pillow.

For I was almost a rich woman. By the provisions of Carl's will, made soon after our betrothal, all he had—and it was more than was generally supposed—was mine. Ronald had been the only confidant of his generous intentions. He told me of it on our way back to Old Harbor, and to the Mother, who had been confined to the house by a severe cold ever since the Saturday she had spent in the city with Felix. My brother introduced the subject with great tact and tenderness, but

I checked him before he was half through the story of how nobly he who had gone—"your husband," he called him—had dealt with me.

"I cannot talk about it!" I said, shortly, and turning my face to the bleak scene through which we were swiftly speeding, thought of the happy, happy day when I had stayed away from the chapel and the inaugural address, to work with fingers, sore and soiled, upon the rug for the new Professor's room,—the chamber for whose furnishment I had sacrificed my winter hat and spent every cent of my hardly saved hoard; the day when, with the sunlight lying across my lap, I had chanted my innoent canticle of the fragrant vine and budding pomegranates.

Sick in body and mind; sullen, rebellious, with eyes that had known neither sleep nor tears since the hour that witnessed the travestie of a marriage-form between an unloving bridegroom and a self-deceived woman, I sought the Mother's presence. She sat by her chamber-fire in an easy-chair, dressed, but still wan from the effect of recent sickness. Her head rested upon the chair-back; her eyes were closed, and Papa's Bible was on her lap. She had not heard me enter, but she was thinking of me, for she did not start, or exclaim at my touch and voice.

"Mamma! I have come back to you!"

She opened her arms and I fell within them, weeping wildly and wretchedly.

I was not comforted yet, nor for long afterward. The bruises and the blood and the faintness were upon

me, and the bitter ooze of the waves that had gone over my head was yet blinding and strangling me. But I had found firm footing. I was the Mother's still. Even, said my mutinous heart, though God had left me to desolation and the Master cared not that my faith and hope and happiness perished together.

"My darling!" she murmured, while I felt the drip of her tears on my bowed head—bowed, I verily believed, as woman's head was never bent before. "Dearer than ever! Blessed Saviour! Thou who wast born of a woman! look upon our child's affliction and her pain, and comfort her with Thyself!"

I did not leave my bed—her bed—for many days.

Spring had come to the old garden, with hyacinths, narcissus, tulips, and snow-drops. The bees were humming in the peach-trees and the birds building in the apple-boughs when I revealed to her why I refused consolation that had for text or key-note Carl's love for me and the hope of heavenly reunion. It had seemed impossible that I should unfold to any human being, however gentle and loving, the tale of my dire humiliation, my fatal and foolish errors, and the horror of the awakening from these. It happened in this wise: We were together in the summer-house one delicious Sabbath afternoon, and had gone back, as we had a habit of doing in our confidential talks in that consecrated retreat, to Papa's "vision."

"He was very fond of Carl!" said the Mother, a smile of infinite sweetness stirring her lips, her eyes looking upward to the sea of amber light, rolling in

slow ripples above the distant hills—the Wyanoake mountains surrounding Carl's burial-place. "How much they must have to say to one another! Other of the shining ones are familiar with our names and histories through listening to those two."

The hot misery rushed up to my lips, and would not be controlled.

"If I could believe that, even there, Carl likes to remember me! that he is happy in the anticipation of my coming!" I cried. "Mamma! Mamma! nobody ever loved me—nobody wants me except you! I am tempted to believe sometimes that the Father Himself has a spite against me. Yes! I know that is rank blasphemy!" seeing her pale, shocked face. "But why, if this be not so, has He cursed me from the beginning?"

It was the cry of the human and the smitten in all ages—"Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?"

I raved on until the tornado was spent; and a softer fall of tears hindered my utterance.

"And now that you know how wicked I am, you cannot love me as you did,—that you understand how little right I have to mourn as other widows do, you will be less sorry for me," I sobbed. "I never had either lover or husband, you see! While I bear Carl's name, and use the fortune he bequeathed to me, I am acting a lie, for which he must despise me, if the glorified ever think of anything so low and contemptible as my ignoble griefs."

"My daughter! do you think earth-fogs can rise so

high? If I, in my poor, mortal love, hold you dearer than ever before, in the knowledge of all that you suffered; in the thought of how strong and true and womanly you have shown yourself to be in this exceptionally severe ordeal—must not our Carl, with eyes purged from prejudice and fleshly desires, his spirit looking straight into yours, value all this aright, and love you for it? He understands now that Rosa Wagner—vain coquette—could never have made him happy; that his, not yours, was the mistake. He sees my May at last as she is, and what she would have become to him had his earth-life been prolonged."

With other and more solemn and touching words she drew the poison from the fretting wound, treating me neither as infidel nor backslider, but as the Father's very own child whom pain had made for the time unreasonable; whom He had loved through all my misconception of His discipline, my ingratitude and neglect; loved me the more yearningly for my anguish; how He held out arms of divinest pity toward me still, begging me to be healed, and reconciled to Him,—saying, "Only wait for the Hereafter—for the abundant recompense! Have I not promised, and shall I not perform?"

When we arose to go in, she kissed me with a blessing that was like an angelic benison.

"Will you not believe that Carl may have talked to you this evening through my lips?" she said.

And I answered that I would, that I *did*, believe it. That she was *taught*, I did not doubt. It brought

warmth and strength to my broken spirit to think whose the message might be.

I had never entered Carl's room since his death, although I knew the key which hung beside my toilette-table to be that of the door. After parting with the Mother in the lower hall, I went upstairs, took this down, and fitted it, with trembling fingers, in the lock. I had expected to find the cheerless blankness of a disused apartment. But the hangings were fresh and crisp from the laundress' hands, the windows over the garden open, and on the writing-table was a glass of white roses from the bush Carl loved best. There was still a pink flush on the walls and curtains from the west which enabled me to see that not one article of furniture had been altered, not so much as a book been removed from its place since I last dusted and arranged all before going to Mereton. The Mother had visited the sacred spot avoided by me, every day, for love of him and in faith in the return of my right mind. I opened the little pocket-bible. The worn book-mark slid into my hand. Holding the book open, I leaned over the window-sill to read in the waning light the passages against which the embroidered slip had lain all these months.

"And I said my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord; remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

"*This* I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' saith my soul; 'therefore will I hope in Him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him; to the soul that seeketh Him.'

"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.

"It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."

And again:

"He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men."

The light failed me there.

* * * * *

Uncle Ronald had come to live with us in February, and for two years he remained a part of our family. Our worldly circumstances were much improved. The absolute need of making one dollar do for the work of two; the numberless contrivances and daily variations of ingenuity to which we children had been trained from babyhood—these belonged to a past we yet would not forget,—a past, beautiful with the chastened lustre of love, of self-abnegation and sorrow for love's sake,—a past where all the shadows were cast backward by the clear shining of the Hereafter we were not let to doubt was our heritage. "If children, then heirs!" was one of what we used to call "the Mother's proof-texts."

Uncle Ronald lived with us then for two years,

insisting upon paying his board regularly, and making us presents now and then—never expensive ones, but always fitly chosen. When he died, somewhat unexpectedly, after a week's sickness, we mourned for him deeply and sincerely, with never a suspicion that we could be anything but losers by his decease. His brothers, who had paid scant heed to his whereabouts or actions during his lifetime, attended the funeral without their wives and children; composed their patrician features into the prescribed cast of fraternal regret, and sustained the Van Coyne dignity grandly throughout the public ceremonial. They unbent visibly to Ronald, as a popular young divine, who might, by his brilliant career, efface from the public memory, and partially from theirs, the recollection that his father was—socially and ecclesiastically—"a failure." They thawed more generously when they ascertained that Ronald's wife, a lady accomplished and thoroughbred as any in their exalted sphere, was the daughter of Morris Brainerd, the wealthy and philanthropic banker.

Uncle Ronald had left directions that his will should be read immediately after the funeral.

"A mere form, of course!" said Mr. Theodore Van Coyne, aside, to the Mother. "The few hundreds poor Ronald contrived to save from the wreck of his patrimony shall be yours. We do not need them. Thomas and I are agreed upon this point."

If he had said "the few hundred thousands," he would have been nearer the mark. Our eccentric

relative had not died a millionaire, but the amount of his salvage astounded his affectionate brothers—almost terrified us. And it was all—without reservation—the Mother's!

She arose to her feet, in the midst of the little company, strangely agitated for one whose usual bearing was so tranquil.

"Are you sure there is no mistake!" she asked the lawyer, almost as if she hoped there might be.

"I drew up the will, Mrs. Hedden," was the reply. "The securities are unimpeachable. The testator was of sound mind. The act was deliberate and without prejudice. Allow me to offer you my congratulations, my dear madam, upon the good fortune you merit so richly."

Instead of answering, she left the room, with a swift, uncertain step. Following her to her chamber, uneasy at her singular behavior, I surprised her weeping as I had seldom seen her weep.

"I am not ungrateful," she made reply to my questioning, through her tears. "God is very good—gracious and bountiful beyond our most extravagant desires, to my children and myself. He will forgive me that my first thought was—'Why did not this thought come years ago? while *he* lived!' He was not strong to battle with mean and sordid cares. He was too high-minded to truckle to the popular demand for novelty and noise. He fell in the fight. When one tithe of this wealth would have preserved to him his manhood among his fellowmen! My Felix! my love!"

It was a passionate gust of emotion, although transient, and I stood appalled at its suddenness and might. And there had been times when, in my ignorant stupidity, I had wondered if she had felt the trials peculiar to her lot as the wife of such a man—one set in a wrong place (judging after the manner of men), and viewed through a false medium, all his weary days as I, or any woman as sensitive, would have done. I saw now, as I had never done before, how perfectly her submission matched her faith; what a strong stay was the religion that had borne the wear and strain of all that had been hers to endure, to do, and to interpret. Yet in all this she had sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

Oh! what was I, that I had cried out against the inequality of His ways!

While I cast about in my distress for fitting phrases of comfort, I caught the whisper with which she emerged from the cloud. She sat very still, her head bent upon the big old Bible that had been Papa's, lying on the stand before her.

"Not many rich, not many mighty, are called! Lord and Master, I am Thy steward! May I deal aright with that which is Thine."

I began this story of lowly life and labor, one stormy night last winter, when I could not sleep, for the wind and the great rain dashing against my window-panes, gurgling and rattling like ice-pellets down the overgorged gutters, as it did that last night of the year when we watched beside Carl's death-bed. June

warmth, June verdure, June flowers—all the glory and perfectness of the new-born summer, rejoicing in its strength—are abroad in the earth as I write this last page. Sitting by the open window of the fair, large chamber which is mine in our Mereton home, I look across a pleasant garden into other windows, and behold yet pleasanter things.

That is Ronald's house, and between the white curtains of that shaded upper room I see Esther, graceful and handsome matron, hushing her youngest-born to sleep in her arms. A splendid boy he is—a year old yesterday. "Aunt May's baby" he is called by both households, for his name is Carl Cromer, and he loves me as well as he does his mother. Some day, God willing, I shall adopt him formally.

"Our Mereton home," I said above. The Mother and I live here, with Mark, who has chosen to be a business man, and is in Mr. Brainerd's office. Felix is practising medicine here—a popular and able physician, who has a wife and house of his own. Albert is pastor of the very church in Leighton to which we once hoped Papa would be called.

"This is as he would have had it, had he been allowed a glimpse into the future," said the Mother, when the call, unsolicited by the young clergyman or his friends, was presented to him. "I think he is glad over it to-day."

The clatter of high-stepping horses and whirl of wheels in our embowered street attracts my attention to a carriage just stopping at Ronald's door. It is

well that Esther is laying baby Carl in his crib, for she is to have a visitor. A lady alights amid a flutter of blue, white, and pearly-gray that becomes her well, although she is no longer young. Wealth, taste, and grace are hers, a distinguished place in society, and for a husband the most admired man in Mereton; but as she stands in the porch, unconscious of my scrutiny, awaiting the answer to her ring, I can discern lines of care, discontent, fretfulness, and longing upon her pretty face. Otis Wagner "did well for himself," said the approving many, when he married his cousin. Bella Atlee outlived her wedding-day but six months, and by her death the younger sister became sole prospective heiress to her father's estate. Shortly after this event it began to be whispered that Otis had long been secretly attached to his cousin, but was withheld from declaring his sentiments by lurking scruples touching the expediency of marriage within certain degrees of consanguinity. These scruples were overcome, rumor presently averred more confidently, and his passion drawn to the surface by the discovery that his elderly friend, Mr. Van Coyne, had serious designs upon the hand of the young lady, in which he was encouraged by the father, whose admiration for the splendid cosmopolite's deportment and reputed wealth was immense. Otis Wagner took the matter in hand—and a vigorous hand his was when he cared to put it forth—to such purpose that the discomfited Mr. Van Coyne shortly sailed for France, with the expressed intention of ending his days on the Continent, leaving be-

hind him the reputation of being a mercenary adventurer, whose scheme of advantageous matrimony had been cleverly thwarted by the astute clergyman. In gratitude, perhaps, for her deliverance, Rosa bestowed herself and fortune upon him who had achieved the rescue.

Esther, who knows her better than I, "is sorry for her." For she also knows her husband.

"Who will never like Ronald," she says, not very regretfully. "Partly because I preferred an honest Christian gentleman to a clerical *diplomat*, however fascinating; partly because he cannot endure a divided sovereignty. If he had his way, his own church would be the only temple of God in this great town of a quarter of a million souls. It does not suffice him that, by his address and eloquence, his house of worship is crowded to overflowing, so long as ours is likewise filled with interested hearers. I am afraid, sometimes, May"—this very gravely—"that he is not a good man. The best of human kind, even the ministers of the Holy Word, are but mingled iron and clay. But in his making-up there is so much that is 'of the earth, earthy,' and the clay is of such a base sort!"

"The Lord knows His own, my love," replies the Mother, in gentlest deprecation; "and our God is very patient."

THE END.

1874.

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